

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF KURDISH WOMEN IN LOCAL POLITICTS:

THE CASE OF NUSAYBİN

By

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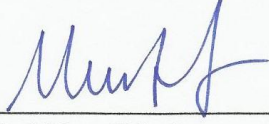
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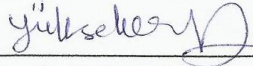
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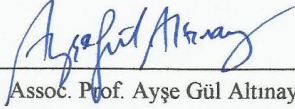
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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the political participation of Kurdish women in Nusaybin. Based both on an analysis of programs and statutes of pro-Kurdish political parties, and in-depth interviews conducted in Nusaybin with politically active women, this thesis claims that the political mobilization of Kurdish women cannot be solely explained by the new opportunities provided by the Kurdish political movement since this leaves women, who do not join the movement, out of our sight. Instead, this study argues that, along with the Kurdish movement's gender policies, women's very own struggle is essential in explaining Kurdish women's participation in local politics. Furthermore, this thesis attempts to reveal the impact of ideology and the Kurdish movement's gender policy on women's political participation within a dialogue with the social movements, new social movements, and cultural opportunity structure literatures. The analysis of the interviews is structured so that they reflect women's experiences in politics and the relationships these women establish with various actors in Nusaybin's political arena such as politically active men, the state, and the municipality. Although individual stories of women reflect a change in gender roles brought by their engagement with politics, a significant transformation of gender roles in Nusaybin seems still far from sight.

Keywords: Kurdish women, political participation, cultural political opportunity structure, Kurdish political movement, Nusaybin

ÖZET

Bu tez Kürt kadınlarının siyasete katılımını Nusaybin örneği üzerinden analiz etmektedir. Bu tez ilk olarak Kürt siyasi partilerinin parti programlarını ve tüzüklerini, ikinci olarak da Nusaybin’de siyaseten aktif kadınlar ile yapılan derinlemesine mülakatların analizine dayanmaktadır. Bu çerçevede, bu tez Kürt kadınlarının siyasete katılımının sadece Kürt siyasi hareketi tarafından oluşturulan yeni fırsatlara bağlı olarak açıklanamayacağını çünkü bu analizin siyasete katılmayan diğer kadınları değerlendirme dışı bıraktığını iddia etmektedir. Bunun yerine bu çalışma Kürt kadınlarının yerel siyasete katılımında Kürt hareketinin geliştirdiği kadın politikalarının yanında, kadınların kendi çabalarının esas olduğunu savunmaktadır. Bu çalışmada toplumsal hareketler, yeni toplumsal hareketler ve kültürel siyasi fırsat yapısı literatürlerinden faydalanılarak Kürt siyasi hareketinin kadın politikasının ve ideolojisinin kadınların siyasete katılımı üzerindeki etkisini ortaya çıkarmayı hedeflemektedir. Derinlemesine mülakatlar sonucunda elde edilen verinin analizi kadınların siyaset içindeki deneyimlerini ve beraber siyaset yaptıkları erkekler, devlet ve belediye gibi aktörler ile ilişkilerini ortaya çıkaracak şekilde yapılmıştır. Her ne kadar kadınlar söylemlerinde siyasete katılımın Nusaybin’de toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin değiştirdiğini belirtse de, Nusaybin de toplumsal cinsiyet açısından bir dönüşümün yaşandığını söylemek zor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kürt kadınları, siyasete katılım, kültürel siyasi fırsat yapısı, Kürt siyasal hareketi, Nusaybin.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“If I told you about my life, the records would not be enough. I can say that my life is like a tale. Since I was born, I never lived for myself. I always lived for my family, and my loved one whom I have been waiting for 25 years. But after I turned 35, I decided to live for myself and I got involved in politics. My life is a very long tale” (Interview with Safiye (40)¹: Nusaybin).

When Safiye told me what is written above, what I thought was “is it possible for Safiye to live for herself hereafter?” In other words, can politics or particularly Kurdish politics let her live for herself, or is she expected to sacrifice herself for her nation and people? Probably, only she can answer this question and her experiences will determine the outcome. However, Safiye is only one of many women who actively participate in the politics in Nusaybin. Is there a significant change in the life of other Kurdish women after participating in politics like Safiye? This thesis is an attempt to reflect the experiences of politically active Kurdish women in Nusaybin. In this study, the term “politically active” refers to being members of political parties, as well as participating in demonstrations, protests or other public political activity. It does not include political stands that women take in their personal life. It is limited to the public activities of women.

Yuval Davis and Anthias claim that women who participate in ethnic/nationalist and religious movements are seen mostly as symbols of the movements rather being active agents (1989). However, the authors dismiss that women are not the same women throughout a movement or struggle. In other words, women improve and transform themselves within the process of participating in the movement, as well as transforming the movement itself. Women’s demands can change or differ from those of men within the movement, and change over time.

¹ It shows the age of respondents.

For example, in the first place they might be involved in the movement by demanding mainly national rights, while later on it can transform into both national and gender-related demands.

In the early 1990s, the Kurdish movement achieved to mobilize women in the national struggle different from previous Kurdish uprisings or leftist movements in Turkey. Especially, Kurdish women became public figures in the protests and demonstrations. At the same time, in that period, Kurdish women started to follow their male relatives' cases in courts, visit them in jails and investigate the aftermath of enforced disappearances and political assassinations. These responsibilities pushed women to make contact with human rights organizations like *IHD* (Insan Hakları Derneği-Human Rights Association); political parties (mostly pro-Kurdish ones); as well as lawyers and bar associations. Of course, not all women were involved in the Kurdish movement through these means. However, these events and experiences mobilized more and more women in the 1990s.

After the mobilization of Kurdish women in the Kurdish movement in masses, the Kurdish movement began to change or transform its gender policy step by step. The best way to see this development in the gender policy of the Kurdish movement is to analyze pro-Kurdish political parties' party programs and statutes. The reason is that these parties had to improve their policies to include women, to consolidate women's participation and attract the attention of new women to the movement alongside ideological factors. For example, in HEP's (*Halkın Emek Partisi*-People's Labor Party-1990) party program only one paragraph is devoted to women and this paragraph focuses on women's rights as a component of human rights. Also there is a section following this paragraph, which is called "protection of family" and which refers to family as the fundamental and natural unit of society which is why it should be protected. On the other hand, there is a strong emphasis on the gender policy on the whole party program and statute of HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*-The People's Democratic Party-2012) and this program sees family as prototype of the state. This minor state restricted

women in every level of society. From HEP's gender policy to HDP's gender policy there is a very significant change. However, this change has happened gradually by more and more women's participation in the movement.

The 2000s correspond with the institutionalization of the Kurdish women's movement. In 2003, DÖKH (*Demokratik Özgür Kadın Hareketi*-Democratic Freewomen Movement) was founded as an umbrella organization to gather all minor and local women organizations under its roof. From 2003 to 2014 DÖKH had been very influential on the determination of gender policies of the Kurdish political movement. For example, all female deputies and mayors were determined by DÖKH and women's places were nominated as candidates as well. In 2015, in order to enhance women's organizations Kurdish women decided to organize their structure in the form of a congress called KJA (*Kongreya Jinen Azad* -Free Women Congress). Also, in May 2015, they established KÖM (*Kadın Özgürlük Meclisi*-Women's Freedom Assembly) which is an assembly that is connected to KJA. According to KÖM, none of the social conflicts can be solved without overcoming the male dominant system. In this regard to ensure a permanent peace in Turkey; women's salvation struggle must be done at the same time.² Women's freedom issue is the central target of KÖM. To overcome women's problems in a male dominant social structure the Kurdish women's movement suggests also a new epistemology called *Jineology* (Women's science). *Jineology*, mostly, is seen as a challenge to feminism among the Kurdish women since, for them, feminism does not go beyond the patriarchal sovereignty, power relations, state structure, and mentality. The discussion of *Jineology* is important, since it shows that Kurdish women have self-confidence to challenge feminism. This thesis aims to reveal how all these discussions and issues are implemented in local politics. In other words, how policies and the ideology of the Kurdish movement are applied in a small district like Nusaybin will be discussed.

²I participated in this two-day meeting in Istanbul on May 9-10, 2015 named as "Demokratik Çözüm ve Müzakere Sürecinde Kadın Özgürlük Çalıştayı".

The study of Handan Çağlayan, *Mothers, Comrades, Goddesses: Women in the Kurdish Movement and the Constitution of Woman Identity*, inspired me to do this thesis. Çağlayan's study is a general overview of the Kurdish women's movement; I want to analyze whether her arguments fit in the local politics or how they work in a small district like Nusaybin. Also, Çağlayan did her fieldwork in 2005 and published her book in 2007. After this time period, there have been many developments in the Kurdish women's movement and in the gender policy of the Kurdish political movement. For example, recently, the Kurdish political movement decided to implement co-chair system in the municipality, which means that there is a female and a male mayor at the same time in the municipalities under the control of the Kurdish political movement although there is no legal recognition of this system by the state and state's institutions. In this thesis, I contend that all the structural changes and developments of the Kurdish political movement have effect on the participation of women in politics both at national and local level. However, it should be noted that without the personal struggle of women this would not be possible, otherwise all women should be expected to be in the political area. Within this framework my research questions are: How do politics affect the life of politically active Kurdish women? How do they experience the local politics? How does participation of women in local politics determine and shape social relations in Nusaybin? How do gender policies or ideology of the Kurdish political movement affect the participation of women in local politics? How much do the gender policies of the Kurdish movement have effect on the transformation of the gender roles within the movement itself?

1.2. Methodology

This thesis is built on analyzing primary sources, party programs and statutes, of the pro-Kurdish political parties from HEP to HDP; literature review and in-depth interviews with 18

Kurdish women and 3 Kurdish men.³ With the exception of one interview in Istanbul, all interviews have been conducted in Nusaybin, Mardin. In addition, participant observation has been carried out to a limited degree. Analyzing the primary sources of the pro-Kurdish political parties provide a framework to understand the context of gender policy and discourse of the Kurdish movement. Therefore, I analyzed only women related parts of pro-Kurdish political parties' programs and statutes. On the other hand, to study the political participation of women one needs to give place to women's own voice and experiences. Otherwise, this study would reinforce the subordination of women if the study only depended on the policies of the parties. For this reason, I conducted in-depth interviews to reveal the experiences of women vis-a-vis politics. This method also allows women to re-create and re-construct their experiences as they narrate their political stories. Review of existing literature on the Kurdish women's movement in Turkey enables to see what kind of works were done so far and to find even a small gap to make constructing my own study. Also, the strengths and weaknesses of current studies would be my guide during my own study. By limited degree participant observation, I mean, I joined one women's meeting and one protest during my field work in Nusaybin and spent lot of time in the "party" and municipality which gave me a chance to see women outside of the interview time.

It is not a coincidence for me to study this topic as a result of both my ethnic identity as a Kurd, and gender identity as a woman. For this reason, the narratives of Kurdish women in Nusaybin also made me think about my own activism in the Kurdish political movement. Most of the time, I felt like I should be more objective and put a distance between me and my respondents and the topic. However, what Drova Yanow stated below helped me to overcome this problem:

³I decided to interview men because I want to know about how men perceived and see political participation of women in Nusaybin. I interviewed especially three men who are active in the Kurdish political movement.

Researchers often choose their settings because they worked or lived there previously or have family ties to that place, speak local language or a related one, and/or have some personal connection to the activity they are studying. There is nothing wrong to hide this. Within the ontological and epistemological presuppositions underlying the interpretative research “objectivity” ...is not conceptually possible (2009: 287)

Rather than doing a fieldwork in a city, I preferred to do it in a small district. The reason is that it is very difficult to argue that a small group in a city can represent the whole city. However, for the district; this problem of representation can be overcome to a degree. Besides this, the place of research was determined according to two other factors: first, being a place where the Kurdish movement is very powerful and second, a place where there is a female mayor experience. The Kurdish movement can apply its policies easier, including gender policies, in the places where it has more power and legitimacy. Nusaybin is one of those places where the Kurdish movement is very powerful. Also, I analyze and reveal whether the existence of a female mayor has an influence on the participation of other women in politics. For these reasons, Nusaybin is a suitable place for my case study.

I conducted a pilot study with two Kurdish women in Nusaybin in October 2014 to prepare my questionnaire. In January 2015, after preparing semi-structured questions, I conducted 20 interviews until February in Nusaybin and then I did one interview in May in Istanbul with the former woman mayor of Nusaybin. To find potential interviewees, personal connections from Istanbul were used in the first place and then after accessing the field in Nusaybin, snowball sampling was used to find other interviewees. Interviews were conducted in different places, such as the party center (DBP), the municipality and the houses of informants.

I chose my informants mostly from among women who are actively involved in local politics. “Being actively involved in local politics” includes being a member of a pro-Kurdish political party (DBP/HDP), participating in the protests, demonstrations, or being a peace

mother within the scope of this study. In other words, women do not have to spend all of their time in politics to be included in this study. Another criterion when deciding on interviewees was generation. I tried to conduct interviews with women from different generations to see whether there is any difference between their standpoints in politics. 18 Kurdish women from different generations were interviewed. Their age range changes between 23 and 58. Other criteria were accessing women with different lifestyles and socioeconomic statuses (See figure 1, to see demographic features of women informants).

Pseudonym	Age	Language of the interview	Level of Education	Marital Status	Place of Birth
Berivan	27	Kurdish	Secondary school	Single	Nusaybin
Safiye	40	Kurdish	Primary School	Engaged	Nusaybin
Müjde	37	Kurdish	None	Divorced	Nusaybin
Gülşah	45	Kurdish	Primary School	Divorced	Nusaybin
Arife	48	Kurdish	Literate	Married	Nusaybin
Ceylan	39	Turkish	Higher Education	Married	Nusaybin
Dilan	27	Turkish	Higher Education	Married	Diyarbakır
Saadet	28	Turkish	Higher Education	Single	Şırnak
Sakine	34	Turkish	High School	Married	Nusaybin
Emine	58	Kurdish	None	Widow	Nusaybin
Havva	50	Kurdish	None	Married	Nusaybin

Güler	34	Turkish	High School	Married	Nusaybin
Leyla	41	Kurdish	High School	Widow	Nusaybin
Ayla	53	Kurdish	Primary School	Married	Nusaybin
Melike	42	Kurdish	None	Widow	Nusaybin
Nermin	25	Kurdish	Primary School	Engaged	Nusaybin
Narin	23	Turkish	Primary School	Single	Nusaybin
Ayşe	50	Turkish	Higher Education		Urfa/Suruç

Figure 1: Demographic features of women interviewees.

Interviews were designed as semi-structured thus during the interviews questions were added or skipped according to the interview's context. This also gave me flexibility to ask any questions related with the ongoing interviews. Interviews lasted minimum 35 minutes and maximum 2 and half hours. 11 women interviews were conducted in Kurdish and 7 in Turkish. This especially was parallel with the generational difference. Young women mostly demanded to speak in Turkish because they stated that they could express themselves in Turkish better even if they could speak Kurdish as well. All interviews were recorded on a tape-recorder after taking the consent of the participant. Both Kurdish and Turkish interviews were transcribed and translated by me. The data analysis is based on these transcriptions, field notes, informal conversation and observations.

1.3. The Limitations of the Thesis

In January 2015, when I went to Nusaybin, there was a big petition campaign for "Freedom of Öcalan". For this reason, all women and men cadres of the party and Kurdish organizations

went to collect the signature everyday while I was there. Therefore, I had to wait until they returned from the signature campaign until the evening when they dropped the signatures to the party administration. For most women, evening was the time to go home and prepare dinner for their family so it created difficulty for me to convince them for an interview. I overcame this problem by doing interviews with young and unmarried women in the evening and visited other women's homes after dinner, as we scheduled together. Also, on Sundays they did not participate in the signature campaign, so I did some of the interviews on Sundays.

During the fieldwork in Nusaybin, my ethnic identity provided me with the opportunity to find and speak with respondents very easily. However, this also provided an obstacle for some interviewees' narratives. Some of my respondents did not want to go to the details since they had an assumption that I already knew about the topic and that some of the details could be unimportant for me. They told me phrases like "you already know about this society", "I am sure that you see the same from your own family", "you are also not unfamiliar with this situation". On the one hand, these kinds of phrases constituted a confidence between me and my interviewee, on the other hand, I felt like that they skipped some narratives.

Another limitation was between me and young generation women. Although my ethnic identity created confidence between us, my position as a researcher created a distance, especially with young women who did not receive higher education. In other words, formal education level became a barrier between me, as a researcher, and women who were at a close age with me.

Within the scope of this thesis, it was not possible to cover the Turkish women's movement in the early Republican period and Islamic women's movement in the 1990s, although there are many similarities and commonalities with the Kurdish women's movement, such as being organized separately from the initial movements with feminist impulses. In addition to this,

this study limits itself to women's movements which have a link with the Kurdish political movement. However, there are also several organizations which worked independently from the Kurdish political movement in the Kurdish region; for example, KAMER (Kadın Merkezi-Women's Center) is one of the independent organizations that worked on the gender issue since 1997.⁴

The final limitation of this thesis is that there are no women interviewees other than Kurdish women who were actively engaged in politics in the HDP/DBP line. However, in Nusaybin, there are also Turkish, Arab, Yezidi and Assyrian women. Also, certainly, there are Kurdish women who are not participating in HDP/DBP politics; for example, women who are active in AKP or other political parties. It would be very valuable to know how the gender policies of the Kurdish political movement and achievements of the Kurdish women's movement affect "other women" in Nusaybin.

1.4. Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is designed as six chapters. The second chapter emphasizes the roles of women in social movements and tries to reflect how and why women participate in social movements or ethnic/nationalist movements. General theoretical discussions on the social movement literature and particularly on the new social movement literature which gives more attention to the cultural difference and agency of the actors in the movement benefit this chapter. Also, this chapter focuses on how *cultural political opportunity structure* creates space for women in the movement. In order to situate political activism or participation of Kurdish women in the context of the social movements' literature, this chapter also includes the existing literature on the Kurdish women since this thesis defines the Kurdish political movement as an ethnic/nationalist movement. This theoretical chapter will provide a ground to discuss and

⁴ For more about the KAMER and its founder activist Nebahat Akkoç see: Ceren Belge (2012). "OHAL'de Feminizm: Nebahat Akkoç Anlatıyor". Ayizi Kitap.

evaluate the participation of women in the Kurdish movement in the light of existing literature.

The third chapter provides a historical background of the Kurdish uprising. It also includes Kurdish women's movement in historical perspective from the 1980s until now. This historical overview contains important debates and discussions of this time period. The debate on the *difference* which corresponds to "third wave feminism" discusses the framework of Kurdish women's movement in Turkey. Moreover, how the difference between Kurdish and Turkish feminists provides a ground for the institutionalization of the Kurdish women's movement is analyzed. A current debate on gineology (*women's science*) which claims to go beyond feminism is given place in this chapter. These discussions will illustrate the development of the Kurdish women's movement from the 1980s to present.

The next chapter analyzes pro-Kurdish political party's programs and statutes to show a link between the policies and how gender policy of the movement is reflected at the local level. The transformation of the party's programs and statutes over time will show the parallel development of gender policies of the pro-Kurdish political parties and increasing women's participation in politics. In this chapter, I claim that if politics opens a space and creates opportunities for women; this will enhance participation of women in politics. The fifth chapter analyzes the data gathered from the field and interviews with Kurdish women who participate in politics in Nusaybin. These data are divided into five important themes which derive from the interviews in relation to the story of women's participation in politics; how women define themselves before and after the Kurdish movement; gender relations in Nusaybin's politics; relationship between women and the state in Nusaybin and finally municipality and women's relationship. The final chapter summarizes the concepts and discussions following the results of the study and includes suggestions for further studies.

CHAPTER 2: WOMEN'S ROLE in SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In this chapter, I would like to explain why and how women participate in politics and social movements. What is the role of women in social movements? Under which circumstances women would find places in social movements? I am going to make use of theories of social movements, especially from those focusing on political opportunities, cultural political opportunity and new social movement literature to analyze the gendered nature of social movements. From this general point of view, I aim to analyze why and how Kurdish women participate in the Kurdish movement and in local politics as a part of Kurdish movement.

I will start by exploring and defining social movements. Sidney Tarrow defines social movements as “collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities.” (1994:4). The common definition of social movements is a group of people who consciously attempt to build a radically new social order or change current social structure (Zirakzadeh: 1997; Wilson: 1973; Jenkins: 1981). For Charles Tilly, social movements are part of what is called “contentious politics”. He explains contentious as “the sense that social movements involve collective making of claims that, if realized, would conflict with someone else’s interests political. In the sense that the government of one sort or another figure somehow in the claim making, whether as claimants, objects of claims, allies of the objects, or monitors of the contention.” (2004:.3). Tarrow explains that there are many types of collective action; however all of them are not in the form of action that is required for a social movement (1994:5). Paul van Seeters and Paul James underline some specific conditions to identify a social movement: “(1.) the formation of some kind of collective identity; (2.) the development of a shared normative orientation; (3.) the sharing of a concern for change of the status quo and (4.) the occurrence of moments of practical action that are at least subjectively connected together across time addressing this concern for change.” (2014: xi).

Traditional definitions of social movements emphasize structural factors for protests occurred for example; political opportunity structure and availability of resources (K. Noonan; 1995: 3). However, New Social Movements (NSMs) scholars criticize this structural approach on the grounds that they ignore the cultural and ideological factors that shape the protests. NSMs theory also criticizes resources mobilization theory for its emphasize on rationality, strategy and organization instead of focusing on meaning, identity and cultural production in collective action (Melluci: 1988). At the same time, structural approaches to social movements ignore the importance of agency, strategies and the element of chance since they stresses broader political system, historical changes, economic structure and general characteristics of society (Kılıçarslan; 2013: 42).

For Buechler (1995) NSMs approach “emerged in large part as a response to the inadequacies of classical Marxism for analyzing collective action.” (p:441). Reductionism of classical Marxism according to Buechler does not allow for an evaluation of the contemporary forms of collective action in two ways: first, Marxism claims that all political and social action derives from the fundamental economic logic of capitalist production and, it assumes all other social factors as secondary; second, Marxism assumes that the most significant social actors will be defined by class relationships and all other social identities are secondary (Buechler; 1995: 442). On the other hand, NSMs theorists take other factors into consideration such as politics, ideology and culture as the fundamental elements of collective action, and they have looked for other elements of identity such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality as indicators of collective identity (Ibid:442).

Another important criticism to traditional social movement approach is that the theory is grounded as male-centered and it lacks a gender perspective.

2.1. Women in Social Movements

Although women take place in the social movements processes such as protests, demonstrations and marches, when it comes the institutional politics (being members of political parties, participating in the decision making mechanisms of the movement or political parties) they can rarely find a place. Einwohner, Hollander and Olson explain the main reason behind the exclusion of women from politics as follows: “political participation is perceived to be normal for men. In contrast, women’s participation has been seen as anomalous, ineffective, and sometimes inappropriate because it contradicts gender expectations.” (2000, 681) This means politics and social movements are *gendered*. Authors define the term gendered as “some aspect of the movement constructs differences between women and men and/or elicits a certain set of social meanings because of its association, actual or assumed, with femininities or masculinities.” (2000:682).

Gender expectations create lots of obstacles for women not only in terms of access to politics but also in all aspects of their life. Such expectations depend on the distinction between public/private, rational/emotional and material/spiritual. Women are situated in private, emotional and spiritual areas which refer to the “inside” or “home” while men situated in public, rational and material “outside” and “the world”. Of course, throughout history, many women have been struggling against these expectations and distinctions. Nevertheless, such distinctions still exist. For example; both Kurdish women and Kurdish men have been struggling in Kobane for a long time. During this time, Kurdish women fighters have been in the cover of well-known magazines (Elle, Marie Claire) and newspapers very often because those women go beyond their gender roles and enter in male dominant area. This is perceived as an anomaly by national and international public, in general.

It is still perceived an anomaly for women to be present in all levels of politics. Women mostly find places in politics, social movements and wars in assistance positions. They are expected to do charity work and or assignments which complement men's work. It should be noted that this situation is not only valid for Turkey or the Kurdish political movement but in other cases too. For example, even though, Palestinian women actively participated in the "Intifada" they were not allowed to participate in peace negotiations with men (Augustin; 1993: 38-39). Another example is from Sierra Leone. After armed conflict which lasted between 1991 and 2002, women have been actively participating in peacebuilding process however in post-conflict period they were encountered with many obstacles to participate in local politics which is dominated by patriarchal culture, religion and patronage relations (Castillejo; 2009: 3). In United States, parallel to gender expectations, women were expected to join in the environmental movements, animal rights movements and movements against poverty because these types of movements are *gendered*, the social images associated with the sex of protesters (Einwohner et al.; 2000: 685). However, it should be noted that gendered social movements or politics is not always a negative concept for women since women themselves apply gendered tactics to participate in social movements. For example; Kurdish women very often refer to their motherhood and this tactic carries them to the political sphere or gives them the right to find a place in the movement. Joseph (1986) defines this situation as: "women should 'pay a price' to enter politics which men do not have to". This price could be given up from their feminine identity and being genderless or opposite of being genderless, stressing their womanhood too much for example, as being mothers of children, being honorable mothers of society/nation in the social movements.

According to Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg there are four types of issues that attract women into social movements or protests: " those directly linked to economic survival; those related to nationalist and racial/ethnic struggles; those addressing broad humanistic/nurturing

problems; those identified in different eras as ‘women’s rights’ issues.” (1990: 13). However, participation in politics does not always mean being an active component of a movement. This situation is also relevant for the case of Kurdish women’s place in the Kurdish movement because even though the Kurdish political movement has the intention to mobilize women, it has a strong sexist, inegalitarian and male-chauvinist approach to women (Yuksel, 2006: 777). Although, the Kurdish political movement has a strong patriarchal characteristic, women have gained very important positions and improvements both as a result of their own struggle with their male counterparts and Turkish officials, and as a result of gender policy which was introduced by the Kurdish political movement such as quota, co-chair system etc. Yuksel (780) explains this process as the following: “On the one hand, Kurdish nationalism politicized and mobilized Kurdish women. On the other hand unintentionally, it led Kurdish women to develop a womanhood and/or feminist consciousness by their questioning the prevalent sexism of Kurdish nationalist men. This process of questioning eventually gave way to an organized political activism of the Kurdish women on their own behalf starting with the mid-1990s”. In other words, while the Kurdish political movement tried to mobilize women and introduced gender policies, that intention created opportunities for women to go further from the national demand of the Kurdish political movement.

2.2. Political Opportunities and Women’s Participation in Politics

Political opportunity structure or political process theory is defined by Tarrow as “consistent - but not necessarily formal, permanent-, or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements” (Tarrow 1996: 54). For McAdam et al. (1996) there are four elements of political opportunity structure: the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system; the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity; the presence and absence of elite allies; and the state’s capacity and propensity for repression.

Noonan points out that it is important to open political area for women; women then can transform that area according to their own demands with their effort. She gives an example of Chilean women's movement and states : "Ironically, the preexisting maternal frame, which encouraged women to become active in the "public" sphere in increasing numbers, had an unexpected outcome: women became politicized in the process, often leading to important frame transformations from maternal to feminist" (p:102). Bahati Kuumba, in her article which analyzes and compares *Montgomery bus boycott* in the US and the South African *anti-pass campaign* of black women, she gives attention to the "gendered nature of political opportunity" structure. According to her, gender identity itself can create opportunity for women in some movements: "In the cases of the Montgomery bus boycott and anti-pass movements, the political opportunity structures from which both movements emerged created distinctive political openings for resistance by women, relative to their male counterparts" (2002:9).

Tarrow claims that "movements are created when political opportunities open up for social actors who usually lack them" (1991:1). This statement shows how much political opportunity structure depends on structural elements. In this regard, Goodwin and Jasper (2003) criticize the concept as claiming to explain too much, neglecting the importance of activist agency and offering only a mechanistic understanding of social movements (Quoted from Meyer;2004: 126). Also Noonan criticizes the political opportunity structure for not having enough attention to cultural factors since the Third World countries and authoritarian regimes do not fit into existing framework of political opportunity structure. In order to overcome this problem, Noonan suggests that we should have a concept of "cultural opportunity structure" (1995:85). Cultural opportunity structure defined by Meyer and Minkoff (2004) as:

[I]mportantly constituted through movement sector cultural dynamics, which include, but are not limited to, competitive recoding of shared language. Furthermore, drawing on theories of frame and cultural resonance, cultural opportunity is constituted in great

part from the stability and soundness of the links between the social meanings used in programmatic statements and their empirical referents. (Quoted from Hallgrimsdottir and Benoit, 2007: 1396).

Cultural opportunity structure mostly refers to cultural conditions or dimensions that facilitate movement emergence and effect movement success (Williams, 2004:95). As stated earlier, Marxism and structural approach were criticized for lacking cultural perspective. Cultural perspective means bringing back the *meaning* and focusing on the ways in which movement used symbols, language, discourse, identity, and other dimensions of culture to mobilize and motivate members (Ibid: 93). Meaning refers to how participants of a movement perceive and evaluate their own involvements and focuses on which factors (moral, emotional, rational) keeps people doing that action by their own ways (culture). This perspective provides a framework to understand cultural reasons behind the emergence of grievances and mobilization of masses by taking identity, agency, and culture of participant into consideration.

It is important to note that framing theory stresses meaning and culture as well. However there is a difference between framing theory and cultural opportunity structure. According to Williams (2004) most culturalist studies have a *movement-centric* approach, in other words the unit of analysis in these kinds of studies are internal factors of the movement like norms, beliefs, symbols, identities and languages which produce solidarity and maintain collective action (Ibid:94). Although, culturalist approach to social movements seems to contrast with structural approach, it has also constant view to demands- such as grievances or shared identity -of social movements. In other words, for culturalist or framing approach social movements emerge when social resources like grievances, injustices or shared identities are available. On the other hand, cultural opportunity structure takes into consideration structural factors along with cultural factors to analyze a social movement.

The criticism of Goodwin and Jasper addresses the *agency-structure debate*. In this debate, on the one hand, there are rules which organize and shape human behaviors; on the other hand, there are individuals who are determined and responsible for their action and behaviors. The first view is associated with Emile Durkheim and the representative of the second one is Max Weber. However, Antony Giddens proposes a third position which is addressing the *dialectical relationship* between human “agency” and “structure” in this view both human agency and structure are important to explain social life and organizations.

Although I agree with criticisms of Goodwin, Jasper and Noonan on political opportunity structure that the theory ignores the agency of social actors, taking into consideration both these criticisms and agency-structure debate I will use cultural opportunity structure to explain Kurdish women’s political participation. Within this framework, I claim that in order to mobilize Kurdish women, the Kurdish movement opened up the political area by implementing various policies for women like many other ethno-nationalist movement such as Palestinian movement and Philippian movement. However, opening up of new opportunities for the Kurdish movement cannot by itself explain involvement of women in politics since this cannot explain the situation of other women who do not join the movement. Therefore, I argue that the gender policies of the Kurdish movement as well as struggle of Kurdish women themselves had an impact on the women’s participation in politics.

2.3. Women in the Ethno-Nationalist Movements

For this thesis, it is important to look at the situation of women in ethno-nationalist/political movements because of the fact that Kurdish movement fits into this category. Below, the situation of women in the ethno-political/nationalist movements will be briefly discussed.

Mencutek claims that socio-political movements have close link with ethno-nationalist movements/parties for two reasons. First, ethno/nationalist movements have the ability to

mobilize a great number of women and second, “these movements influence parties’ policy choices.” (2015: 4). Cynthia Enloe states that women usually assume very minor, mostly symbolic, roles in the ethnic/nationalist movements which are portrayed as icons of the nation to be protected and glorified or booties in the war place to be occupied rather than being active component of the movement (1990:45). Anthias and Yuval-Davis argue that women have been placed in the ethnic or/ and nationalist projects in five major ways:

- As biological reproducers of the members of national collectivities
- As reproducers of boundaries national groups
- As active transmitters and producers of the national culture
- As participants in national, economic, political and military struggle (1989:7).

From these categories above, it can be interpreted that women are participants of the ethnic/nationalist movement only as passive “victims” or instruments however Kandiyoti states that women have been active participants in nationalist movements and struggles for national independence in many countries (1991:17). On the other hand, Sylvia Walby argues that women do not always participate in the ethnic/nationalist movements for the same reasons as men. They could have other reasons to participate and this also gives women agency (2013). Enloe emphasizes that ethnic/nationalist movements mostly depend on men’s experiences not women’s. She claims that if national culture and projects build on women’s experiences, that would be a different kind of nationalism (Walby, 2013: 45).

Walby questions these five categories about women’s roles in the ethnic/nationalist movement and she asks a question: Does the relationship between gender and ethnic/nationalist projects consist of only these five categories? (2013:40). For her, there should be some contributions in this field because we could not talk about a monolithic

women's group, there are differences among women so we should stress those differences rather than commonalities (2013: 41).

In many ethnic/nationalist movements female body is identified with the "homeland" and men are identified as protectors of the "homeland". For example; raping women in the wartimes by soldiers means invasion of the country. Also, in the wartime women were expected to give birth to more and more children to compensate the ones who died in the war. It could be said that glorification of mothers and motherhood is also related with their productive and reproductive roles. This supports what Yuval-Davis and Anthias identified women as biological reproducers of the nation. The Kurdish movement also stresses the concepts of "mother" and "motherhood" too much especially in the 1990s. However, nowadays, with the high participation of women in politics and their struggle it is going to transform (Çağlayan, 2007). In ethnic/ nationalist movements, women are also associated with the transmission of culture. Especially in the example of "mother tongue", women are responsible to teach national language to their children which is equated to "mother tongue". In this regard, "mother tongue" itself is could be seen as a problematic concept since this term gives all responsibility of transition of language to mothers.

Although ethno-nationalist movements usually treat women as symbols and biological reproducers of the nation rather than active participants of the movements, these movements create opportunities for women to increase their political visibility and recognition, gain collective gender consciousness and political experiences and in some degree bargaining power in their homes and communities (Mencutek; 2015: 4).

In the following section, taking all these discussion into consideration, especially, the roles of women in the ethnic/nationalist movements, the literature on the politicization or political

participation of Kurdish women will be reviewed in order to analyze how Kurdish women find a place in the women studies in the Turkey and how it transforms during the time.

2.4. Literature Review on Kurdish Women

Although feminist movement gained power and was mobilized after the 1980s, there is a consensus that women's movement has started in the final era of the Ottoman State (Berktaş, 2003; Sirman, 1989; Çakır, 1994).⁵ In the 1980s, women got together and organized discussions on their subordination and roles in the family and society. Those meetings and discussions were called as "consciousness rising" by feminist writers. Serpil Çakır (2009) states that even though there was a feminist movement which gained power since the 1980s, social and political sciences remained "gender blind" until the 1990s in Turkey. In the 1990s, feminist movement was institutionalized. In universities women research centers and graduate programs of women's studies were founded (Yüksel; 2003:1). In the same years, feminist writers mostly wrote on the distinction between public and private space and several more issues to propose "women question". Feminists argue that there is not a sharp distinction between public and private space, former one is devoted for "rational" men and second one for "emotional" women.

Participation of Kurdish women in politics can be analyzed under two periods. First period started in the 1980s to the 1990s.⁶ This period corresponds to the politics of terrorization of the "Kurdish issue" by the Turkish state. Therefore, the state applied highly coercive measures to suppress the Kurdish movement, Kurdish language and Kurdish cultural expression (in the form of music, literature, and other means). Some of those measures were

⁵ Acceleration of the feminist movement correspond with the significant time period which after coup d'état of 1980. There has been a debate on how mobilization of feminist movement could be possible while there was such an oppressive time period in Turkey. For further reading on this topic see: Şirin Tekeli, "Women in Turkey in the 1980s", (ed) Women in Modern Turkish Society, Zed Books, 1995. Yeşim Arat, "1980'ler Türkiye'sinde Kadın Hareketi: Liberal Kemalizmin Radikal Uzantısı", Toplum ve Bilim, No: 53, 1991.

⁶ I am aware that Kurdish women became politically active since 1960s and 1970s in the leftist movements however it is not on the scope of this study.

political assassinations, enforced disappearances, killings under custody, forced migration and jailing. Kurdish men who were members of the Kurdish political parties or being sympathizers of those parties became the targets of the state. In the aftermath, their husbands, fathers, brothers or sons were killed; arrested or disappeared therefore mostly women were ones to carry out their legal processes or went in front of the jail gates for waiting for their loved ones, such as in the case of *Cumartesi Anneleri (Saturday Mothers)*. Women took responsibility of the legal processes of their male relatives because the state did not see women as someone who should be seen as serious. Çağlayan says those experiences of Kurdish women led them to politicize and develop a relationships with the Kurdish political movement (2007: 172-9). Bozgan describes this situation of Kurdish women with phrase of “accidental activism” to show mobilization of them from passive victim to active component of the movement. (2011:772). Second period of participation of Kurdish women is the 2000s. This period, on the one hand, corresponds with the institutionalization of the Kurdish women’s movement which means Kurdish women founded their own women organizations and institutions like DÖKH (Demokratik Özgür Kadın Hareketi- *Democratic Freewomen Movement*). On the other hand, in the 2000s, profiles of women were changed towards young, single and educated women from middle age women who had to been in the political sphere due to searches or investigations of their male relatives’ fates (Çağlayan; 2007:139). After 2000s, not only profiles of Kurdish women changed but also the Kurdish political movement introduced radical changes towards institutionalizing greater gender equality. Quota and co-chair systems are the leading indicators of such institutionalization.

One of the most important features of the 1990s was that the feminist movement in Turkey encountered with the challenge of Kurdish, Islamist and the Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual - Transsexual (LGBT) movements in Turkey. These movements criticized monolithic characteristic of Turkish feminism instead they proposed an alternative perspective which

includes their pluralities and difference (Diner and Toktaş; 2010:42). Especially, Kurdish women criticized Turkish feminists via their writings in Kurdish women/feminist journals.⁷ These journals mostly published articles which stressed the double oppression of Kurdish women because of their female and national identities.⁸ They claimed that Turkish feminists ignore their oppression derived from their ethnic identity. Yuksel (2006; 784) addresses this problem as follows: “Turkish feminist women mostly failed to see the Kurdishness of Kurdish women.”

In those feminist/women journals, Kurdish women focused on difference between them and Turkish feminists. For example; in one of the article published in 5th issue of Roza magazine, titled “How much are you Turk?” wrote: “you (Turkish women) and your state are very similar in your attitude against ethnic and minority groups.” (1996; 5: 14). In these journals, although Kurdish feminists emphasized their difference from Turkish women, they expressed their similarities with black women’s movement in the USA and Europe. Therefore, writings of the pioneers of black women’s movement were translated into and published in Kurdish women’s magazines (Çaha; 2011: 436). This characteristic of Kurdish feminists/women can be evaluated in the framework of “Third wave” feminism in Turkey. The main argument of third wave feminism is there is no universal womanhood which first and second waves of feminism referred. Instead, there are different womanhood experiences according to women’s races, classes and socioeconomic status.

In the period of the 1990s, as stated, although there were some “comprehensive” studies on women’s issues in Turkey, Kurdish women were excluded from those studies. As Yuksel (2006) and Çağlayan (2008) state that in those comprehensive studies Kurdish women were

⁷ For these journals see: Roza, Jujîn, Jin û Jîyan, Özgür Kadının Sesi, Yaşamda Özgür Kadın,

⁸ For comprehensive study on Kurdish women’s journals see: Zeynep Kutluata, “The politics of Difference within the Feminist Movement in Turkey as Manifested in the case of Kurdish Women/Feminist Journals”, Boğaziçi University, (Unpublished MA thesis), 2003; Ömer Çaha, “The Kurdish Women’s Movement: A Third-Wave Feminism Within the Turkish Context”, *Turkish Studies*, No. 3, 435–449, 2011.

invisible. These studies are *1980'ler Türkiye'sinde Kadın bakış açısından kadınlar* (From Women's Perspective Women in Turkey in the 1980s) (Tekeli (ed), 1995); *20. Yüzyılın sonunda Kadınlar ve Gelecek* (Women and the Future in the end of the 20th Century) (Çitçi (ed),1998); *75 Yılda Kadın ve Erkekler* (Women and Men in 75 Years) (Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu (ed), 1998). Çağlayan (2008; 8) says Kurdish women were mostly invisible in social sciences but only they appeared under the conceptualization of “eastern women” or/and rural women. The operationalization of eastern or rural women identifies those women as uneducated, victim of social backwardness and needed to be rescued by “other women”.

One of the first studies on Kurdish women is the anthropological study of Yalçın Heckmann which is entitled as *Tribal Women: Gender Role and Female Strategies among the Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Societies* (Tekeli; 1995). In this article, Heckmann writes about female strategies among Kurdish tribal women within a patriarchal community. Her aim is to emphasize women's power in everyday life and she states that women are not only victims of patriarchal system but also they have resistance strategies to struggle with such system. She says that in tribal societies women are a part of production and reproduction systems. Therefore, being a part of production system allows women to take a part in the decision making processes (Yalçın-Heckmann; 1995, 222). In the article, author emphasizes the tribal identity rather than ethnic identity of women.

In the 2000s, Kurdish women became more and more visible both in the public and social sciences as passive victims of ongoing conflict and active components or agent of the Kurdish movement. In this decade, studies on Kurdish migrant women who live in metropolitan cities of Turkey were common. One of those studies is Çelik's article (2005) is titled “*I miss my village*” *Forced Kurdish Migrants in Istanbul and Their Representation in Associations*. In this article, Çelik discusses how forced migration affects daily lives of Kurdish migrant women in Istanbul both as women and Kurds. She also indicates that ethnic difference

contributes to the creation of “them” and “us” and how this raises ethnic consciousness among both Kurdish male and female migrant through ethnic and hometown associations. Wedel’s article (Wedel; 2005, 155-182) is another study on possibilities of political participation of Kurdish migrant women in slums of Istanbul. This study depends on the author’s observations and interviews during the 1994 local election. According to the author’s field finding, in the slum areas of Istanbul, political participation of Kurdish women was very low. One of the obstacles of Kurdish women derived from distinction between private and public space for example to enter public space women should speak public language (Turkish) and have formal education (2005, 162).

As stated above, to approach Kurdish women as passive, uneducated, eastern women; this could hide all differences of Kurdish women based on their socioeconomic status. However, in the literature there are some studies which overrate the agency of Kurdish women. According to these studies, unlike other Middle Eastern ethnic groups (Arabs, Turks and Persian), Kurdish society have been treated their women as equal to men. Therefore, during the Kurdish history there are many women leaders such as Kara Fatma and Adile Hatun (Alakom; 2005: 75-100). On the leadership position of Kurdish women, van Bruinessen indicates that Kurdish society has been very patriarchal society and this is the same in all history. However, one can see Kurdish women in leadership position in politics or military, in their history (van Bruinessen; 2005: 131). Both van Bruinessen and Klein claim that “women leadership” has been used by nationalist intellectuals to provide unity among women and men as nation and dealing only with national issue rather than women issue. (Klein; 2005:23). Moreover, van Bruinessen stresses that women who are in the leadership position mostly came from aristocracy class or inherited their husband’s positions. (2005:145).

The first comprehensive book on Kurdish women was edited by Mojab (2005): *Women of a Non-state Nation: The Kurds*. In this book, articles reflect on Kurdish women from different

perspective: historical, nationalist, cultural, political and social-linguistic. Mojab, the editor of the book, has two articles in the book which both of them on relation between nationalism and Kurdish women.⁹ Mojab's argument is that nature of nationalism is patriarchal and women should be against the nationalism instead of supporting it. Mojab focuses on the relationships of Turkish and Kurdish women with nationalism. For her, these both nationalisms have used women as instrument of their projects. She argues that Turkish feminists are very loyal to support nation-state project and ignore Kurdish women just as their state did and that the Kurdish feminists sacrifice Kurdish women movement for Kurdish nationalist movement (2005: 19-25). Although, Mojab criticizes Kurdish and Turkish women for having no distance from national projects, she states that due to the statelessness of Kurdish people, Kurdish women cannot receive enough attention in academia and international arena (Mojab, 29). It seems there is a conflict between her two ideas about Kurdish women, first one criticizes relation with the nation-state and the second one reflects necessity of nation-state for Kurdish women to find place in academia and international community.

Çağlayan's book *Mothers, Comrades, Goddesses: Women in the Kurdish Movement and the Constitution of Woman Identity*, is the most widely known academic study on Kurdish women's movement in Turkey written with feminist perspective. She conducted in-depth interviews in Diyarbakır with Kurdish women who took part in Kurdish political movements and used survey technique to gather information about profiles of some women member of HADEP. The main question Çağlayan ask is whether their position is to be evaluated as objects or subjects, even though they have participated in politics collectively. For Çağlayan, both of these approaches are problematic because there is no homogenous category of Kurdish women. Approaching Kurdish women only as passive victims of social

⁹ Although my conceptualization of Kurdish women refers Kurdish women who live in Turkey, Mojab's conceptualization is not restricted by Kurdish women who live only in Turkey rather contains Kurdish women who live in Iraq and Iran.

transformation is problematic, however; seeing accession of public space as emancipation of women problematic too (Çağlayan; 2007: 20). In the Kurdish movement, women have a very symbolic place just like other ethnic/nationalist movements in all around the world. Kurdish Women were invited to be active component of establishing “new life” with their male brothers to constitute a new social construction which does not depend on supremacy of men.¹⁰ For this invitation men were expected to give up their “false manhood” while women were supposed to be goddess (Çağlayan; 2007: 109-113). Çağlayan says that women have not only symbolic place in Kurdish movement but also historically, they gained very important active position in the movement, especially after new code of DEHAP in 2003 (2007: 87-135). It should be indicated that from the time when Çağlayan wrote her book (or dissertation) to nowadays there are some important development on roles of women in the Kurdish politics for example; Çağlayan does not mention DÖKH (Demokratik Özgür Kadın Hareketi-Democratic Free Women Movement-2003) because in that time it was a very new institution. But, now, DÖKH has a very significant and autonomous role in the Kurdish political movement. For instance, in the party program of BDP, it was written that “all of our gender policies are parallel to DÖKH’s target and principles”. Co-chair system also was implemented in Kurdish politics (2005) two years before Çağlayan’s book was published so Çağlayan did not have the chance to analyze the impacts of DÖKH and the co-chair system in her study.

Çağlayan’s book provides a ground for discussion of Kurdish women’s activism. Especially, politicization of Kurdish women became one of the important topics in the literature. There are some master theses on *politics of motherhood*. In other words, authors analyzed how motherhood became a useful tool to open political area for Kurdish women. These studies are mostly on the political activism of *Saturday Mothers* and *Mothers of Peace*. However, theses

¹⁰ There is a concept of “new life” in HDP too. In their organization campaigns one of the sub indicators of “new life” is *women*, and it was written as “*new life* only would be organized under the leadership of women”

which were written on Saturday Mothers mostly focus on how political protests of women or mothers in *Galatasaray Meydanı* transform the urban space or create a new space for women in the middle of Istanbul rather than focusing on political participation of those women (Kocabıçak, 2003; İvegen, 2004). On the other hand, Özlem Aslan in her master thesis on *Mothers of Peace* analyzes politics of motherhood. She focuses on how motherhood became an opportunity for Kurdish women to participate in politics. At the same time, she questions the limit of motherhood politics with the comparison of Turkish and Kurdish women's motherhood and demonstrates how motherhood practices differentiate women as "accepted" (*makbul*) and "so-called" (*sözde*) mothers in the context of Turkey (Aslan: 2008). Başak Can also wrote an article on the political activism of *Mothers of Peace*. She states that in the literature common view holds that on the one hand motherhood identity is considered to have become an emancipatory tool for women; however on the other hand, is argued to create a new form of *genderless* women. However, she claims that in the case of Kurdish women the politics of motherhood turns to an experience which empowered them in the public sphere instead of enclosing women in the traditional roles. (2014: 41).

There are also two relatively recent studies which focus on the political participation of women rather than categorizing them as mothers or non-mothers.¹¹ One of them is Nerina Weiss's article which is based on the testimonies of four politically active women. She argues that the discourse of the Kurdish political movement on emancipation and empowerment of women creates new control mechanism over the lives and bodies of the women (2010:57). Constituting her argument on the testimonies of four women she claims that there is no change on the gender roles for women and women do not identify themselves by their political activeness, since the status associated with their roles does not necessarily represent

¹¹ For Kurdish women's political participation in Iraqi Kurdistan see: Nadjé al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, "Between Nationalism and Women's Rights: The Kurdish Women's Movement in Iraq", *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 2011, p: 337–353.

their own experiences and subjectivities (Ibid: 55). In the scope of this thesis her arguments are problematic for two reasons: first, the sample of the study is too restricted to represent all the Kurdish women's movement and two, the author does not propose any evidence to support her arguments. The second study is published more recently (2015) by Zeynep Şahin Mencutek, this article is on the representation of Kurdish women in pro-Kurdish political party BDP (Peace and Democracy Party). According to the author the high level of representation of women can be understood by examining the interaction between *party-related* and *movement-related* factors (2015: 1). Depending on the empirical study she states that "the leftist ideology of the party, along with the mobilization strategies and needs of the movement, have had a decisive impact in creating the conditions for women's self-assertion and their taking positions of power within the party, including the adoption and scrupulous implementation of a voluntary party gender quota." (Ibid:1). This argument is supported in this thesis by the concept of political opportunity structure. In other words, structural factors open spaces for women and these opportunities enhance the political participation of women after which women can be empowered to transform such environment according to their demand by their struggle.

This chapter evaluates the situation of Kurdish women both benefiting from social movement literature particularly in the context of cultural opportunity structure and existing literature on Kurdish women in the Turkey. From this point of departure, it could be said that not only structural factors affect political mobilization of Kurdish women but also they have their own motivations to participate in politics after the political area opened up. Also, there is a transformation on roles of Kurdish women in the literature, in the 1990s, women mostly found place as "victims" of ongoing conflict in the Turkey and as the object of the patriarchal violence in the Kurdish region however, in the 2000s, this perception gave place to studies which have analyzed political activism of Kurdish women.

In the next chapter, there will be a historical overview of the Kurdish women's movement. The chapter will analyze the ways in which Kurdish women's movement emerged and the dynamics behind it.

CHAPTER 3: KURDISH WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN TURKEY AFTER the 1980s

In this chapter, I will first give a brief history of the Kurdish uprising or movement in Turkey. Then, I will analyze the Kurdish women's movement within this historical perspective from the 1980s up until now. This historical overview will also contain important debates and discussions of these time periods. I will also aim to reveal how and why Kurdish women participate in the Kurdish political movement.

Kurdish people are an ethnic minority whose territory has been divided among four countries: Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. In the nation-state literature Kurdish people were also qualified as “a nation without state” (Mojab, 2001; Mencutek, 2015; Gottlieb, 1994). In Turkey, Kurds perceive East and Southeastern Anatolia as the Northern part of Kurdistan. The language of Kurdish people is Kurdish (some dialects of Kurdish are spoken in different territories) and they are mostly Muslim. Kurds have mainly been in struggle with these four countries, especially in the aftermath of the treaties, such as Treaty of Lausanne, signed after the World War I. A free, unified, and independent Kurdistan has been repeatedly on the agenda of Kurdish political movements operating in these four parts.

Turkey's “Kurdish issue”¹² broke out in 1925 in the leadership of Sheikh Said, two years after the declaration of the Republic of Turkey.¹³ This revolt was the first large scale revolt of Kurds in Turkey. After Sheikh Said Revolt, The Ararat Revolt (*Ağrı İsyanı*) was initiated by Kurdish Nationalists (1926-1930). These two rebellions were suppressed by the Republic and many rebels were executed. Dersim Revolt (*Dersim İsyanı* 1937-1938) was another one of the large-scale rebellions that took place in the Kurdish region of Turkey. Not only many Alevi Kurds died in this revolt but thousands of people were displaced by the Turkish Republic as a

¹² This highly controversial term is used interchangeably with the “Kurdish problem” although the Kurdish people also problematize the latter.

¹³ I am aware that there had been Kurdish uprisings especially in the late Ottoman Era, but I will limit myself to revolts, which took place in the context of the Turkish Republic, as these revolts are more relevant for my topic.

result of the ensuing resettlement policy following the events. After these rebellions Kurdish people remained in silence for a long period, while some pursued political activity within the Turkish leftist groups or parties like Dev-Genç and the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP).

In 1978, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK-Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê)'s foundation was declared in a village called Fis in Diyarbakır by mostly university students under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan. In 1984, PKK launched its first military attack against the Turkish state in Eruh, Siirt. After this attack, PKK gained popularity among Kurdish people and in a short period of time it excited the attention of mostly young Kurdish people. It should also be noted that PKK called not only Kurdish men to mountains but also Kurdish women for fighting for an independent Kurdistan.

In an effort to enter the Turkish political realm, HEP was founded in 1990, as a pro-Kurdish political party. As this party was closed down for being against the Turkish constitution, another party was founded. This continued through the 1990s and 2000s, and numbers of parties were founded, after their predecessor would be closed down. The reason why these parties are called as "pro-Kurdish" parties is not only because their members are mainly based on the Kurdish identity but also in their party programs there have been specific parts devoted to the Kurdish issue to differ from other parties in Turkey. These parties' politics and activities were generally seen as very similar or parallel to the illegal PKK's activities by Turkish public and legislation. Although, in the 1990s they denied their relationship with the PKK because of the suppression of the state, in the late 2000s they made efforts to indicate that they formed the two components of the Kurdish movement with the PKK. In that unity

PKK represents the armed branch of the movement and political parties represent the legal and political component.¹⁴

In the beginning of the 1990s, there were Kurdish uprisings called *serhildan* which were very similar with Palestinian *intifada* in terms of mass participation of people against the state's authority. It was an unusual situation that women joined *Serhildans* massively in front of men in places like Cizre and Nusaybin.

3.1 Kurdish Women's Movement from the 1980s to 2000s

Under following two sub-sections, my objective is to provide a historical overview of the development of Kurdish women's movement in Turkey¹⁵. While analyzing this development process I want to discuss the development of feminist movement and the debate of *difference* between different womanhoods in Turkey. I will take Tekeli's categorization of feminism, according to her (1998) late Ottoman and early Republican periods represent the first wave of feminism, and the period from the 1980s to 1990s is the second wave. After the challenge of Kurdish women's movement in the late 1990s, as will be discussed below, the third wave of feminism has been discussed among feminist scholars in Turkey.

3.1.1 "Feminist movement" in Turkey in the 1980s

Although the feminist movement in Turkey, gained power and mobilization after the 1980s, there is a consensus that women's movement has started in the final era of the Ottoman State (Berktaş, 2003; Sirman, 1989; Çakır, 1994). In the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th century, Ottoman women started asking for their equal citizenship rights by following the first

¹⁴ It is difficult to explain what the term "Kurdish Political Movement" represents and excludes. However, in this study even though I am aware that Kurdish political movement is something more than PKK and pro-Kurdish parties, I will use this term to refer to their combination.

¹⁵ I should indicate that while I am using some definitions like "Kurdish women's movement" or "Kurdish women", I am aware that these terms have very general meanings and it is still not clear who are included or excluded from these groups. Even though I do not use these definitions in quotation marks, they still carry those concerns.

wave of feminism in Europe and the world. Ottoman women's movement was experienced by journalistic and associational activities which were known as common activities of the first wave of feminism (Çakır, 1996). In addition to this, it should be indicated that women's movement was not ethnically homogeneous. Recent studies show that women's movement or activities had a multi-ethnic characteristic.¹⁶ This situation brings questions such as, "what is a movement?", "is this women's activity can be count as a movement?" and "what is the criteria for being a movement?" to one's mind.

According to Yeşim Arat, to understand the 1980s' feminist movement, it is needed to look at the early era of Turkish Republic which could be named as the "Kemalist Era" (Arat, 1991:7). For her, the feminist movement of the 1980s was one of the unexpected consequences of the Kemalist modernization project.¹⁷ In the Early Republican era, Kemalist state had the intention to become a "modern and Western" country and get rid of the "Eastern" characteristic of the Ottoman State. Therefore, the state put some women-favored reforms in its agenda. There were two important implementations of the policy of modernization of women: the 1926 Civil Code and the rights of voting and to be elected in municipality election in 1930 and national elections in 1934. Arat states that the Kemalist regime introduced some important reforms in the framework of its own Westernization agenda but these reforms also provided opportunities for women's movement.¹⁸

Although, Arat (1997), Tekeli (1998), Sirman (1989) and Berktaş (2001) indicate their appreciations to Kemalist state for "opportunities" which were provided for women, they also criticize the Kemalist state for focusing only on the public rights of women and ignoring the situations of women within the family which was also the most known motto of the second

¹⁶ Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, Melissa Bilal, **Bir Adalet Feryadı: Osmanlı'dan Türkiye'ye Beş Ermeni Feminist Yazar 1862-1933**, Aras. Istanbul. 2006.

¹⁷ Arat, P.7.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p: 9.

wave feminist movement around the world. Sirman (1989) says that women had to wait until the 1980s in Turkey for a Feminist movement which focused on the women's problems which originated from being women, while it mobilized in some other parts of the world in the 1960s.

Acceleration of the feminist movement or women's movement corresponds with the significant time period after the coup d'état of 1980. There has been a debate on how the mobilization of the feminist movement could be possible while there was such an oppressive time period in Turkey (Tekeli: 1995; Arat: 1991). Before 1980, women's movement was organized under the umbrella of Marxist, leftist movements. In the political discourse of Marxism, the oppression of women was attributed to the capitalist system just like men, and all proletarians, without distinction, should fight against the capitalist system. The development of the feminist movement in the post-coup period also brought a divergence from Marxist and leftist ideologies, because the development of the feminist movement was understood as separation from other leftist movements which were under state oppression. Although there were criticisms about the situation of the feminist movement in that time period, it became one of the most important opposition groups to support both women and human rights (Tekeli, 2010: 31). It should be noted that, even though Marxist and leftist movements did not allow women to identify their gender based problems separately from their class problems, women gained experiences from the protests and oppositions within these movements (Arat, 1991). Nevertheless, from the beginning of that period, feminist awareness raising groups were composed (Tekeli, 2010: 31). These groups mostly came together in small numbers in metropolitan cities like Istanbul and Ankara. For Arat, those women were educated, professional middle class women who identified themselves as feminists (Arat, 1991: 10). These women translated important classical feminist writings into Turkish from J. Mitchell, A. Michel, L. Segal and A. Oakley, Nawal El Saadawi (Sirman,

1989:18). Tekeli listed the studies of that time period chronologically as: In 1982, in Istanbul a conference was held by *YAZKO* (Yazarlar Kooferatifi- Cooperative of Writers) and it was the first time “feminism” was openly defended in public; In 1983, a volume on feminist women was published in *Somut* magazine; in 1984, *Kadın Çevresi Anonim Şirketi Kitap Kulübü* (Woman’s Circle Reading Club) was founded; in 1986, a petition campaign for the implementation of CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) was initiated; in 1987, to protest domestic violence, series of protests, and marches were organized; in 1989, *First Feminist Weekend Forum in Turkey* was organized by a feminist group called Thursday Group (*Perşembe Grubu*) in Ankara (Tekeli, 2010: 31-32). In 1990, Women’s Library (*Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi*) was established to collect scholarly and literary studies on women and by women in Istanbul. By these activities, the feminist movement legitimized its position in the public and the feminist movement became one the important opposition groups that mobilize women in Turkey.

One of the important debates on Turkey’s feminist movement is about the character of the movement. To clarify this, whether the feminist movement is a movement of the middle class, elite women or as they proposed, whether it includes all women who are oppressed under the rules of patriarchal society. Joan Scott (1986) proposes gender as one of the important categories of analyzing any structure or social-political issue like class, ethnic identity, nation and religion. For me, it is important to look at how we take into consideration class, religious, ethnic identity and nation when we analyze gender itself. In this regard, what is the role of all these categories when we are analyzing Turkey’s feminist movement from the 1980s to 2000s partly will be disused below.

3.1.2 The debate of difference in Turkey's women's movement in the 1990s

The debate of *difference* was mostly carried out by the Black and Third World feminists in the 1970s to refer to difference among women. They questioned how much the women's/feminist movement embraced them as their "sisters" and to what extent white women differed in their attitudes toward black women compared to white men. From this standpoint, black feminists indicated that the first and second waves of feminism consisted from white, Western, middle class women (Çaha, 2011: 436). Black-Third World women's experiences have been ignored by first and second waves of feminism. It is impossible for Black-Third world's women to have the same problems with white-western women because they have different oppression and suppression experiences. Bell Hooks explains how Black women and their experiences were ignored both by black men and white women:

We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or as a present part of "women" in this culture...When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black men, and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on white women. No where is this more evident than in the vast body of feminist literature (Hooks, 1992: 7; cited from Yüksel, 2003:11)

In the context of Kurdish women, in the mid-1990s, mostly Kurdish and Islamist women criticized Turkey's feminist movement by ignoring difference among women themselves. By this opposition Kurdish and Islamist women were seen as representatives of the "Third Wave" of feminism in Turkey (Çaha, 2011; Yüksel, 2003; Diner and Toktaş, 2010).

It becomes apparent that our similarities with Turkish women are less than our differences. Feminism, which struggle for the common oppression of all women, has developed through the knowledge produced by white Western women. The Turkish feminist movement, too, has been supplied by this source and shut its ears to a feminism that was developed through differences. (Roza, 1997 (Vol. 10): 35, cited from Çaha, 2011: 444)

Both Islamist and Kurdish women criticized Turkish feminists by being on the side of the state and for not supporting them in their struggle against the state. Diner and Toktaş refer to the 1990s as a new phase in the women's movement in Turkey:

The 1990s, however, inaugurated a new phase in the women's movement in Turkey as there emerged cleavages in feminism with the challenge of the Islamist, Kurdish nationalist and the gay-lesbian-bisexual-transsexual (GLBT) movements, each of which had diverse worldviews with respect to the causal roots of and solutions to women's problems. As Western feminism started to acknowledge plurality in the understanding of the 'woman' question with the rise of alternative perspectives of black, lesbian and/or non-Western women, likewise, Turkish feminists encountered the challenge of different conceptualizations of the 'woman' question and the politics of identity/difference. (Diner and Toktaş, 2010: 42)

As Diner and Toktaş point out, all these women have different standpoints both in regard of women's problems and their political orientations. For this reason, Kurdish and Islamist women were not necessarily in solidarity as a result of being against the state, because both groups have had different opposition dynamics. While Kurdish women set their position as being against the existing state structure which ignored different ethnic identities, Islamist women were not against the unitary state structure. They were against the implementation of secular (laik) state which did not allow Islamic practices in the public sphere such as wearing headscarf in schools.

Although Kurdish women's movement became mobilized in the 1990s, their political activism has its roots in the 1960s in the leftist movement (Çaha, 2011: 438). In the 1980s, after the military coup d'état, many members of the PKK have been jailed and tortured in the Diyarbakır prison. After they were released from the prison they launched armed attacks towards the Turkish army. This time period corresponded with the separation of the PKK from the Turkish socialist movement and their focusing on the creation of an ethno-national Kurdish movement. The PKK has not only called Kurdish and Turkish men to join its ranks, but Kurdish and Turkish women to fight for independent Kurdistan. Two components of the Kurdish movement, the PKK and legal pro-Kurdish political parties, have strived to attract the attention of women in the rural and urban areas. Even though there have been strong patriarchal relations in the Kurdish region and gender roles have been very strictly defined, women gradually participated both in the legal and illegal sections of the Kurdish movement.

However, as stated above, this does not mean that the participation of the Kurdish women was a new phenomenon, the new thing was the participation of women in masses (Çağlayan, 2007:167).

In the mid-1990s, Kurdish women in the PKK decided to get organized as a separate branch.¹⁹ Parallel to this separation, women who were active in the Kurdish political movement have extended their limits from ethnic politics to gender politics too. Kurdish women have been interested in women's rights issues such as child marriage, violence against women, education of women, and they tried to find a place in the Turkish women's movement as they shared similar concerns (Kutluata, 2003: 32-33). For example, they participated in common activities of women's movement on March 8th, the Women's Day celebrations side by side with Turkish women (Kutluata, 2003:33). However, in that time the Kurdish issue was one the most fundamental problems of Turkey and it was a controversial issue to talk about even in daily life. Kurdish women have not denied that they have been carrying out both a national and a gender struggle. For this reason, it was not easy for them to be a part of the Turkish feminist movement. In 1989, during the celebration of the International Women's Day, a problem occurred between Kurdish women and the Turkish feminist movement since a group of Kurdish women wanted to carry banners written in Kurdish and to give a speech in Kurdish. However organization committee did not allow them to do their demands (Çaha, 2011: 439). After this event, in June 1990, Kurdish women decided to establish an independent "Kurdish Women's Group" (Çaha, 2011:439).

Kurdish women enhanced their criticisms toward Turkish feminists and Kurdish men via Kurdish women/feminist journals in the mid-1990s. They published journals like *Roza*, *Jujin* (Woman hedgehog), *Jin û Jiyana* (Woman and Life), *Yaşamda Özgür Kadın* (Free Woman in

¹⁹ Of course this separation did not only depend on the decision of women. There were some other factors to determine the separation, such as the role of Öcalan.

the Life) and *Özgür Kadının Sesi* (Free Woman's Voice). Roza was the first women's/feminist journal and the one that mostly embraced the feminist identity. Women who were publishing Roza explicitly indicated that they were feminists through their writings in the journal. They asserted that their feminist identity was the reason for their exclusion from the Kurdish national movement and because of their ethnic identity they were excluded by Turkish women from the feminist movement as well (Roza, 1996 (Vol. 3): 5). Çaha says that Kurdish women's struggle was a response against "dual victimization" by Turkish women and Kurdish men (2011: 441). "Men are the slaves of the Turkish state, but we sisters are slaves of slaves and we are women fighting for so-called asexual utopia" (Roza, 1996 (Vol.2):6 cited from Kutluata, 2003: 47).

Although Kurdish women criticized Kurdish men very often, they also did not deny that the two groups were two components of the Kurdish national movement. In *Roza* it was stated as: "*The Kurdish movement which has male color should be supported because it serves the Kurdish women's ends.*" (Roza, 1999 (Vol.16): 14, cited from Kutluata, 2003: 49). The reason behind this support is that both Kurdish women and men addressed the Turkish state as a colonizer state in the Kurdish region and Kurdish women and men were both slaves of that colonizer state. Their salvation required a unified struggle against their "enemy".

While concluding this section, it should be noted that not all Kurdish women's journals have had the same feminist consciousness and questioned the characteristic of the Kurdish nationalist movement. In addition to this, one of the significant points is how Kurdish women's/feminist journal represented Kurdish women on their pages. Necla Açıık (2002) states that in those journals the Kurdish women were symbolized as "goddesses", "patriotic mothers", carriers of culture, victims of the war, biological and cultural reproducers of the nation. She says that that symbolization let women to be seen as "the key of Kurdish nation building" and perceived women as having essential identities and a static culture.

3.2. Institutionalization of Kurdish Women's Movement

In the 1990s, women's protests and activities on the street were not as many as in the 1980s because the feminist movement took a new form (Apak, 2004: 170). This new form of the Turkish feminist movement could be seen as the institutionalization of the movement in Turkey. At centers for women's studies at the higher educational level and graduate programs in women's studies were founded. Moreover, many organizations which were concerned with the improvement of women's life conditions were established (Yuksel; 2003:1). *Women's Library and Information Center* was founded. Both written and visual materials related with women started to be collected (Çakır, 1996b: 755). Another important indicator of institutionalization of the feminist movement was foundation of associations like *Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınma Vakfı* (Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation) in 1990; *Kadın Dayanışma Vakfı* (Women Solidarity Foundation) in 1993; *KA-DER* (Association for Support of Women Candidates) in 1997. In addition to these associations, at the governmental level *Kadının Statüsü ve Problemleri Genel Müdürlüğü* (The Directorate General on the Status and Problems of Women) was founded (Yuksel: 2003, Apak: 2004).

Kurdish women's organizational practices are not a new phenomenon. It started by the foundation of *Kürt Kadınları Teali Cemiyeti* (Society for the Rise of Kurdish Women) in 1919 in Istanbul (Alakom, 2005:89). This society declared its aims as: to ensure that Kurdish women rise up with a modern understanding; "to provide and develop Kurdish Women with a modern mentality, to achieve social reforms, to help orphan women and children who fall into poverty because of migration and catastrophic deaths" (Alakom, 2005:93). *Kürt Kadınları Teali Cemiyeti* was closed short after the foundation of new Turkish Republic like many other Kurdish and other ethnic-based organizations and associations. It took a long time for Kurdish women students to establish their new organization *Devrimci Demokrat Kadınlar Derneği*

(DDKAD-Revolutionary Democratic Women's Association) in 1977 in Istanbul.²⁰ Nezîrê Cibo, who is a Kurdish writer and intellectual and who had a close relationship with the DDKAD, stated the mission of DDKAD as:

“[M]ission of DDKAD was to perform native Tongue and national liberation studies. I can say that the slogan of ‘education in mother tongue’ was voiced first by the DDKAD. Intensive work was carried in accordance with this slogan (motto) and literacy courses were opened for women. At that time, in order to discuss national and women’s matters, many conferences, panels and meetings were held by DDKAD. Although the Association was influenced by the period of socialist ideas, essentially it had nationalist feelings and thoughts.”²¹

DDKAD had the same fate with all other opposition organizations which were closed down after the coup d’état of 1980. As mentioned above, after the military coup, Kurdish women tried to be a part of Turkey’s feminist movement up until the beginning of the 1990s. Kurdish women criticized the feminist movement and Turkish women for being very similar to the state’s attitudes towards Kurdish women and they decided to organize separately from the Turkish feminist movement. The 1990s was a very important time period for the institutionalization of Kurdish women. In 1991, Kurdish women established *Yurtsever Kadınlar Birliđi* (Union of Patriotic Women) in Istanbul and the Union opened up its branches in Diyarbakır, Adana, İzmir and Ankara. However, after some months it was closed down (Bozgan, 2011:772). Between 1991-92, *Yurtsever Kadınlar Derneđi* (YKD-Patriotic Women's Association) was founded. Nevertheless, during the 1990s, there was not an appropriate ground for Kurds to do politics in Turkey “even if they were women”. For this reason, within a short period of time, YKD was closed down. As already stated, Kurdish women’s journals could be seen as important tools of institutionalization of Kurdish women’s movement in the 1990s. It is important to state that those women who were in the executive

²⁰ There is very little information about Kurdish women’s organization before the 1990s. I mostly benefit from some blogs and web pages to get this information. For this reason, it could be some reliability problems.

²¹ Cited from Nezire Cibo’s blog, it is available at <http://nezircibo.blogspot.com.tr/2011/04/25-yil-once25-yil-sonra-iv-nezire-cibo.html>

branches of Kurdish women's movement were mostly educated women who came to metropolitan cities by forced migration (Bozgan, 2011:774).

3.2.1. DÖKH (Demokratik Özgür Kadın Hareketi-Democratic Freewomen Movement)

Up until 2003, many Kurdish women's organizations were founded. Some of those organizations and associations could not survive and some others found abilities to resist against pressures and obstacles from both the Turkish state and patriarchal relations of the Kurdish movement itself. *DÖKH* (Demokratik Özgür Kadın Hareketi-Democratic Freewomen Movement) was founded "by thousands of Kurdish women activists who work in various spheres including civil society organizations, women organizations, youth organizations, political parties and local governments in Turkey" in 2003 in Diyarbakır.²² Some of important aims and principles of DÖKH were listed as:

- DÖKH approaches women's struggles strategically, addresses 'women's liberation ideology' for the solution of social problems.
- In the struggle against the male-dominated system, it is based on the women originated organization model which is refined from the male-dominated rationale and its organization model.
- Against the rationale which masculinizes nations, classes, and race; DÖKH approaches women's problems pertinent to suppressed sex, nation, class, and race from the perspective of women's freedom movement.
- DÖKH conceives the democratic solution of the Kurdish question as the basis for social peace and democratic unity of peoples.

DÖKH was one of the most powerful examples of the institutionalization of Kurdish women's movement because DÖKH not only collected women's organization under one roof but also achieved to make all women who were actively in the Kurdish political movement directly its own members. For example, women who are working in the municipalities and who are members of DBP/HDP (Current pro-Kurdish political parties) are directly members of DÖKH. In other words, all women who are in the political parties, organization,

²² Official BlogSpot of DÖKH, article available at:
<http://middleeastwomanconference.blogspot.com.tr/2013/07/dokh-en.html>

associations, media, and cultural center in the Kurdish movement are also members of DÖKH. Kurdish political movement has encouraged women to participate at every administrative level of general and local politics gradually from 1995 until today. Currently, the aim of the Kurdish political movement is to reach 50% participation of women and it can be said that they are very close to this rate. DÖKH members and activists address this as one of their achievements. They state that as the outcome of their struggle, they enhanced the representation of women in local and general elections; they force their party to implement 40% women quota; they are involved in the solution process of social issues.²³ For DÖKH activists, probably their most important achievement was the implementation of the *co-chair model* in local elections in 2014. A DÖKH activist states that:

By our intervention in patriarchal politics we turned women, who used to be invisible, into active agents, the truth and reality of politics. In this context, our 2014 election strategy will be implementation of co-chair presidency model in the local election.²⁴

In order to institutionalize effectively, DÖKH is organized in the form of assemblies around five different areas as *Ideological Field Assembly*, *Political Field Assembly*, *Social Field Assembly*, *Young Women's Field Assembly*, and *Women's City Assemblies*. For this study it is not required to explain all of these assemblies. However, Women's City Assemblies need to be explained in detail due to the fact that this assembly organized women's participation in local politics. In the declaration of DÖKH it is written as:

[T]he essential working field of the assembly is to establish women's own organizational mechanisms and to promote their active involvement in governing structures. It works for advocating women to take place in local decision-making mechanisms.²⁵

DÖKH organized its 8th *Ordinary Conference* on 10-11 January 2015 in Diyarbakır. In this conference DÖKH radically amended its institutionalization. In order to enhance women's

²³ Interview with a DÖKH activist, Ayten Kordu, in *Özgür Gündem*: 17.09.2011.

²⁴ Interview with a DÖKH activist, Fatma Kaşan, in *Özgür Gündem*: 31.10.2013.

²⁵ Official BlogSpot of DÖKH, the article available at:
<http://middleeastwomanconference.blogspot.com.tr/2013/07/dokh-en.html>

organizations they decided to organize their structure in the form of a congress called *Kongreya Jinen Azad* (Free Women Congress-KJA). The mottos of this congress were *Self-defense* and *No Unorganized Women* against both capitalist modernity and ISIS (Islamic State). KJA explains the ways in which women would develop their self-defense as being part of women's own organization such as assemblies, communes, academia, commissions, and associations to build women's own system.²⁶

3.2.2 Jineology: The Science of Women

The organizational structure and practices empower the position of DÖKH in the Kurdish political movement. Another important reason of empowerment of DÖKH is the support of Abdullah Öcalan, jailed leader of PKK. Öcalan is seen as the founder of the ideology of DÖKH by most women in the Kurdish women's movement. Öcalan defines the most essential problems of the 21st century, which is called *capitalist modernity*, as gender inequality, racism, nationalism, militarism, sexism, devastation of nature, and exploitation of labor, all of which are the products of male-dominated power relations²⁷. Öcalan proposes an alternative system, *democratic modernity*, to fight with the capitalist system. For Öcalan, one of the most important agents of this alternative system is women's movement's coming together with labor movements, ethnic structures, religious movements, intellectuals and oppressed classes.²⁸ Öcalan also suggests a new epistemology called *Jineology* to provide solutions for women's problems in the current male-dominant social structure. Jineology literally means the science of women and *Jin* means woman in Kurdish. Jineology is shown as a new epistemological process to lead women to access the "knowledge of women" directly. In English, jineology is translated as *gyneology*. Öcalan was the first to use this concept in

²⁶ From Free Women's Workshop held by KJA on 9-10 May in Istanbul.

²⁷ Official blog of DÖKH.

²⁸ Official BlogSpot of DÖKH, the article available at:
<http://middleeastwomanconference.blogspot.com.tr/2013/07/dokh-en.html>

writing and called all women's organizations, women academicians and different women's groups to discuss and make contributions to this new analytical concept.

In the written sources of Kurdish women's movement there are answers to why they need to develop the concept of jineology. These answers are also mostly quoted from the writings of Öcalan. They construct their arguments around the question of, why women are still out of the all sciences even though they constitute a half of the world's population.

It is a well-known fact that women constitute the largest part of social nature with respect to both physics and semantics. Then, why should not she become the subject of a very significant science, which is a part of this social nature?²⁹

Kurdish political movement proposes the concept of the “construction of new life” as many other social and political movements. This construction means the formation of new women, new men and new family. In his writings, Öcalan addresses women as the main agent of the formation of the “new life” concept (Jalil, 2014:1). However, Öcalan states that those women who are going to construct a new life should be “free women”. He argues that “no revolution can take place while women are slaves”.³⁰ In this view, freedom of women is not possible in the capitalist modernity system since women are seen as possession. For this reason, women need democratic modernity and their own sciences to get their own knowledge. “The knowledge that those who cannot think for themselves cannot govern themselves, hence cannot be free, is the point of departure of gyneology's search for truth” (Cited from official webpage of DÖKH).

One of the important discussions of Kurdish women's movement is about the relation of feminism and jineology. Jineology, mostly, is seen as a challenge to feminism among many

²⁹ 'Gyneology' in the Search of Truth, it is available at: <http://middleeastwomanconference.blogspot.com.tr/2013/07/gyneology-in-search-of-truth.html>; Ali Firat (Pseudonym of Abdullah Öcalan), “Sosyalist Olmak Öncelikle Eş Yaşamda Özgürlük Düzeyi Tutturmakla Gerçekleşebilir”, Demokratik Modernite, Vol:5, 2013, 15.

³⁰ <http://www.kjk-online.org/hakkimizda/?lang=en>

Kurdish women.³¹ In other words, Kurdish women state that they go beyond feminism by discovering jineology.³² In his writing on jineology, Öcalan named feminism as “the rebel of the oldest colony”³³. In this regard, he states that feminism should be discussed as part of jineology in order to encompass its historical and social values and lineage. On the one hand, Öcalan and women activists appreciate that “feminism has a great role in making the problem of women visible”, while on the other hand, they criticize feminism as “[it] could not overcome positivism in its analyses of social sexism just as it could not analyze the masculine statist civilization in its integrity”.³⁴ In other words, although they agree with some achievements of feminism and its struggle practices, for them, feminism does not go beyond the patriarchal sovereignty power relations and state structure and mentality. Öcalan and women activists suggest an alternative system by saying:

Gyneology will analyze the causes of this failure on the side of feminism in its relationship to existing definitions of women. In this respect, gyneology will be the grounds for purifying feminism from the impacts and limitations of sovereign system and establishing an alternative women freedom perspective and systematics³⁵.

Although the Kurdish women’s movement called all academicians and women’s groups to make their contributions to the theory of jineology, according to them, it still does not attract the attention of women groups as well as Turkish academia³⁶. However, Kurdish women try to open the ground for the discussion of jineology in Turkey and international areas. For example; the journal of Kurdish political movement *Demokratik Modernite* (Democratic Modernity) devoted one of its volumes to Jineology with the title of *Yaşamı Yeniden İnşa Etmek: “Jineoloji”* (Re-building of Life:”Jineoloji”); there was a jineology conference named

³¹ From my informal conversations with Kurdish women in Istanbul and Nusaybin in different time periods.

³² It should be noted that “Kurdish women” is a broad generalization, in this thesis I am using this frame mostly to refer women who are doing politics under the roof of HDP/DBP and PKK.

³³ 'Gyneology' in the Search of Truth.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ 'Gyneology' in the Search of Truth, it is available at:

<http://middleeastwomanconference.blogspot.com.tr/2013/07/gyneology-in-search-of-truth.html>;

³⁶ This disappointment was shared by Kurdish women very often in two-day meeting in Istanbul on May 9-10, 2015 named as “Demokratik Çözüm ve Müzakere Sürecinde Kadın Özgürlük Çalıştayı”.

as “jineology - Radical Thinking and Building from the Women's Perspective” in Cologne, Germany in March 2014 and recently a book was published, *Jineoloji Tartışmaları- Jineology Discussions*, in March 2015.

Within the discussions of jineology there are strong references to mythology, archeology, philosophy, history, economy and science. Especially, mythology and archeology are addressed significant areas to reveal women’s “true history” which depended on a women-oriented society and the periods women were in the power as mother- goddess. In the time period called *Neolithic Matriarchy*, it is claimed, women were actively involved in politics and economy. This period is seen as being very advanced in terms of innovations and socialization (Firat, 2013).

In Neolithic society, there used to be an immense sociality and culture developed around women. The innovation of plants, their blending, farming, cultivation sawing and developing tools to protect the products are the biggest scientific advances.³⁷

The reason behind all these discussion is to show “the truth of women” as very advanced and developed in the history, why and how women were transformed into this new “slave women”, and how they can emancipate themselves from their slavery to create a new society. According to Kurdish women activists and Öcalan, the only way to create a new society depends on the creation of “new women” and this is possible by following jineoloji. In these discussions there is also a strong emphasis on the relation between economy and women. This can be evaluated as a criticism of male-dominant capitalist system. According to Öcalan, the reason behind the falling of women from power was losing control over economy. He states that the term “economy” derives from the “home’s law, home maintenance rules” and this shows that in any historical period women were not outside of economy, instead it was one of her main jobs (Firat, 2013:15).

³⁷ 'Gyneology' in the Search of Truth.

It is not within the scope of this study to evaluate the relationship between feminism and jineoloji as Kurdish women activists did. It is a very bold claim to declare that jineoloji goes beyond feminism. As could be seen from the above picture, jineoloji draws on “women’s nature and morality” which is conceptualized as very peaceful, coherent with nature and creative as described with this sentence of Öcalan: “Enlightenment of the social structure is only possible with enlightenment of women’s nature comprehensively and realistically” (Öcalan, 2009: 226). For Öcalan, women have stronger ties to the society and nature than men since women have advanced emotional intelligence which men did not have.³⁸

Due to the above mentioned features, jineoloji claims that women are superior to men and that they can create a peaceful world like they did before the start of the male dominant period. However, it is well known that this carries the discussion to an essentialist point. In other words, it is dangerous to apply the ancient mythology of mother-goddess to today. Nevertheless, in my view, it is fundamental to ask why Kurdish women, perhaps better to say Öcalan, try to create a new epistemology/science for women and why they approach a new conceptualization. How does this new conceptualization differ from feminism and as it claims, how much does it go beyond feminism? Finally, how much does the jineoloji discussion find place at the grassroots level; for example, is jineoloji known by women who are doing politics in Nusaybin?

The importance of the discussion on jineoloji for this study is that it could be seen as one of the indicators of the transformation of the Kurdish political movement. In other words, this discussion might show how much the Kurdish political movement or the Kurdish women’s movement put the gender issue on their agenda. Another important indicator of the transformation in the Kurdish political movement’s gender policy, it can be observed best

³⁸ <http://tahtim.tumblr.com/post/103350977422/jineoloji-kadin-bilimi-kad%C4%B1n>

from the pro-Kurdish political parties' party programs and statutes which will be analyzed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: WOMAN/GENDER POLICY of the PRO-KURDISH POLITICAL PARTIES: From HEP to HDP/ BDP

In this chapter, I am going to analyze party programs and statutes of pro-Kurdish political parties, as in my view, those party programs and statutes are one of the important indicators of the transformation of women's policy of the Kurdish political movement. The transformation of the parties programs and statutes over time will show the parallel development of gender policies of the pro-Kurdish political parties and increasing women's participation in politics. In other words I contend that if politics open the space and create opportunities for women; this will enhance participation of women in politics. For example, if a party implements women quota this will mean implementing women friendly policy to attract women to join their party as well.

Before going into the topic, it should be indicated that even though these parties were generally named as "pro-Kurdish parties" there are differences among them not only regarding their gender policies but also their larger political objectives through time. For instance, it could be difficult to put *Halkların Demokrasi Partisi* (HDP-The Peoples' Democratic Party) under the same roof with others parties, because, on the one hand, HDP has been defining itself as a "Turkey's party" on all grounds, and at the same time; many HDP cadres came from other pro-Kurdish parties and the "Kurdish issue" remains one of their main objectives.

As indicated above, in the 1990s there were oppressions both on the Kurdish political movement and women's movement. For example, many associations and organizations of Kurdish women were closed down in this period. Therefore, Kurdish women activists who participated in those organizations massively joined the pro-Kurdish political party *Halkın Emek Partisi* (People's Labor Party-HEP) to sustain their political activism (Bozgan; 2011;

Çağlayan; 2006). Kurdish women carried out their political experiences and their gender perspective to political parties. However, the Kurdish political movement has not been enthusiastic about putting women's own problems on its agenda as much as the problems produced by ethnic identity. Furthermore, I contend that the Kurdish political movement appreciated women's political participation in the movement. However, the men in the movement insisted that women should know their place which was assigned by Kurdish men and the society as being secondary. Although many Kurdish male politicians positioned women as the "second sex" in their parties, women still found ways to create opportunities for themselves through their relationship with their parties. As observed in many political movements, Kurdish political movement also creates opportunity for Kurdish women. Actually, it would be better to say that historically Kurdish women have been seeking opportunities as they do politics within the ethno-nationalist Kurdish movement. The achievements of Kurdish women have been showing their impacts on the party programs and statutes of pro-Kurdish political parties. In this chapter, I analyze transformation or change in women's policies in pro-Kurdish political parties through their party programs and statutes. It is important to note that it is not possible to introduce and discuss pro-Kurdish political parties as a whole in the framework of this study. However, women's policies of these parties are introduced not only under headings related to women; instead they are embedded or hidden throughout the whole programs and statutes. But I will limit myself to analyze and discuss only the party programs and status of the parties which are directly relate with women.

There are two aspects of the transformation of gender policy or women's role in the Kurdish political movement. The first aspect, perhaps the more important one, is the struggle of women for their own rights and to be accepted more actively in the Kurdish political movement. The second one is the women's policy of the Kurdish movement, including

Öcalan's perspective on women. Öcalan has been highly influential on the Kurdish movement's political ideology. For Öcalan, women and family are two of the most important aspects of the "party's social project" (PKK's). He elaborated on this in his well-known book called *Woman and Family Question*. In this book and all other his writings, Öcalan points out that "a social and political transformation of Kurds would be possible not only through national liberation, but also through the women's liberation struggle, in a process of 'double liberation'" (Mencütek; 2015: 9). It should be noted that these two aspects are not mutually exclusive and that they feed each other.

4.1. HEP- DEP

Halkın Emek Partisi (HEP) was founded in 1990. According to Çağlayan (2006) there were not any women among the founder members of the HEP. To pass the 10% election threshold, HEP formed an election alliance with *Social Democratic Populist Party* (SHP) in 1991 elections and HEP sent 18 deputies to the Turkish parliament. Only one of those parliamentarians was a woman, Leyla Zana. There are no sources about whether there were any women in the party assembly of HEP. As stated above, women who were active in the Kurdish women's organizations and associations massively joined the HEP. Therefore, HEP provided them an opportunity to sustain their own women/ gender agenda. Although, *Turkey's political parties' law* did not allow women's branches to be opened within the structure of political parties, woman members of the HEP established *women commissions* (Bozgan; 2011:774).

In HEP's 64-page party program, there is only one paragraph devoted to women under the *Social Policies* section, entitled as *Women's Rights*:

Education which excludes women from social life and does not provide equality among women and men will be prevented; laws against equality among men and women will be cleaned, to make women equal to men on all grounds of social life, all

economic, social, cultural and juridical precautions will be provided (HEP Party Program; 1990: 53).

As seen above, HEP politicians focused on equality among men and women rather than emphasizing women's specific problems. The more interesting paragraph comes after the *women's right* section which is the *Protection of Family* section. The summary of that section could be understood from this sentence: "Family, which is the natural and fundamental unit of society, will be protected" (HEP Party Program; 1990: 53). Protection of the family, at the same time, means protection of the gender roles which suppressed women and supremacy of men the society. In the following years the Kurdish political movement and pro-Kurdish political parties would identify the family as a prototype of the state and the most important obstacle for emancipation of women.

In 1991, the *Party of Democracy* (DEP) was established and remained as an alternative in case HEP was closed down³⁹. As expected, HEP was closed down in 1993. HEP's 18 deputies joined DEP. However, in this new party, women became more active since they took place in the foundation process of DEP as opposed to HEP. Therefore, there were some women in the party assembly even though their numbers were very few. Women were not only included in the party assembly but also in the city and district councils in few places. Those women who found place in the party assembly were generally ex-members of *Yurtsever Kadınlar Derneği* (YKD - Patriotic Women's Association) (Bozgan; 2011:775).

DEP's party program consisted of only 9 pages and there is only one paragraph reserved to the women's issue⁴⁰. It might be interesting that women's section was put under the *Democratic State and Society* section instead of the social policy section like HEP did. Gender inequality was identified as a human right violation in both party programs and in

³⁹ In the following years this tactic will be applied very often by Kurdish political movement.

⁴⁰ It was very difficult to find any documents, programs and statutes related with the DEP including TBMM archive. I gained the party program of the DEP from the HDP's archive in Ankara.

DEP's statute. Another interesting point is there is not *family protection law* in the party program of DEP. However, by one sentence it was indicated that motherhood is a natural and societal duty of women and at the same time, there was a reference to woman workers as well:

Official or unofficial gender inequality practices and human rights violations are serious democracy problems. Law will be reorganized in order to sustain equality among women and men and to ensure the participation of women in all segments of the society freely...Hard working conditions and exploitation of women will be put to an end; motherhood which is a societal and natural duty will be protected (DEP Party Program; 1991: 6).

4.2. HADEP (Halkın Demokrasi Partisi-People's Democracy Party)

DEP was banned by the Constitutional Court in June 1994. Also six of the deputies of DEP were arrested and sentenced for 15 years. When the Kurdish political movement got signals that DEP would be closed, they established a new party to replace DEP. For this reason, HADEP was founded in May 1994. There was only one woman among the party assembly members of HADEP (Çağlayan: 2006). Similar to its predecessor parties, although Turkish Political Parties Law did not allow women to organize as branches in political parties, HADEP had a de facto woman branch. However, as could be estimated, while the Kurdish political movement and the party were under the oppression of the state and legislative system, women could not find the ground to put women's own problems on the agenda of Kurdish political movement (Bozgan; 2011:776). Even though there were not many women at the administrative levels of the party, women supported HADEP at the grassroots levels and they participated in the organization to empower the party.

When it comes to analyzing the party program and statute of HADEP there are not many differences between HADEP and its predecessors (HEP, DEP). In other words, the program of HADEP is the combination of HEP and DEP. Under the title "In order to democratize the state and the society" HADEP proposed the following for women:

Education which excludes women from social life and does not provide equality among women and men will be prevented; laws against equality among men and women will be cleaned, to make women equal to men on all grounds of social life, all economic, social, cultural and juridical precautions will be provided (*This part is exactly the same with HEP's party program*). Motherhood which is a societal and natural duty will be protected and family, which is the natural and fundamental unit of society, will be protected⁴¹ (HADEP; 1994:12).

There was only one new sentence in the party program of HADEP. That new sentence is also very interesting and contradictory with other sentences related with women: "Society's settled behavior patterns which actually depend on the male-dominant ideology will be changed by implying special education policies." (HADEP; 2011:12). On the one hand they claimed to change the "male-dominant society" and on the other hand they proposed "protection of the family".

In the party programs of the predecessor parties of HADEP, woman was not seen as one of the component categories of society. In other words, in their party programs, HEP and DEP called out to different actors of the society such as workers, farmers, civil servants, and youth but not to women. HADEP was different from its predecessor parties, as it called out to women as one the components of the society (HADEP; 1994:7).

In 1995 and 1999 Turkey held elections. The 1995 election was a general election and in 1999, there were both national and local elections. In 1995, HADEP participated in the election under the "Labor, Peace and Freedom Block" and if the block passed the 10 % election threshold, HADEP would only send one woman to the parliament. This does not mean that there was only one woman candidate, rather there were several woman candidates however they were not on the chosen positions. In the 1999 elections, the gender representation was very similar with 1995 in terms of the representation of women in the parliament. In the local elections of 1999, HADEP won 39 municipalities in cities and

⁴¹ The first part of this sentence is from DEP's party program and the second part is from HEP's family protection section.

districts in total and in 3 districts, *Doğubeyazıt*, *Kızıltepe* and *Derik*, women were elected as mayors. As seen, representation of women in the party programs and statute was parallel with the representation of women in national and local politics. In other words, when the party program and the statutes' parties placed emphasis on the women and women's policy, these open up grounds for women to participation of women to politics.

The HADEP was one of the most long-lasting pro-Kurdish political parties, as it stayed in the political scene from 1994 to 2003. As mentioned above, there is not much difference between HADEP's party program and its predecessors'. However, there were two important developments about the organization of women in the party. The first one was that young, educated, and urbanite woman activists participated in HADEP after the mid-1990s (Çağlayan; 2007). Those women mostly had gender consciousness and they reflected this consciousness onto their practices. The second significant development was the publication of women/feminist journals like *Roza*, *Jin û Jiyan* and *Yaşamda Özgür Kadın* by Kurdish women. These Kurdish women's journals provided a ground for discussion for Kurdish women and those discussions led women to organize around consciousness raising groups (Bozgan; 2011: 779).

These developments showed their impact on the party statute of HADEP in the 2000 congress. According to the new party statute; women and youth branches were accepted as autonomous units which could determine their own administrative organization. Another important reform in the party statute which was seen as a radical decision was the implication of the "positive discrimination" principle towards women. Perhaps the most radical reform of HADEP was the enhanced 25% voluntary gender quota which made HADEP the first political party in Turkey to introduce a gender quota (Mencütek; 2015: 7). These reforms were stated as:

Up until the abolishment of the obstacles which unable participation of women at the decision making and administrative levels parallel to their labors and their rate in the party, positive support will be sustained. *Women should be represented in all administrative and decision mechanisms in ¼ rate* (Italic is added). If this rate cannot be sustained, the existing number will be accepted. (HADEP statute; quoted from Çağlayan: 2006.)

HADEP was banned by the Constitutional Court in the March 2003 on the grounds that it supported the PKK.

4.3. DEHAP (Demokratik Halk Partisi-Democratic People's Party)

In 1997 DEHAP was founded as a duplicate party in order to take HADEP's place in the case of closure. Before HADEP was banned, the Kurdish political movement decided to participate in elections under as DEHAP in 2002. Eventually, after the closure of HADEP, the party members transferred to DEHAP. The new cadre of DEHAP activated the party and revised the party programs and statute in 2003. Kurdish women gained significant power in the new party (Bozgan; 2011: 779). For example; in the 2002 election, women were nominated as candidates in 25 cities in the first three places including İstanbul, Adana, Ağrı, Batman, Siirt, Urfa and Van where the Kurdish political movement has a high vote potential. The most radical change was the women quota. In 2002 national election and 2004 local election 35% women quota was implemented. However, as Bozgan states, the implementation of quota was not easy for women. Women faced opposition from men in the party and women had to bargain and discuss with their male comrades to implement women quota (Bozgan; 2011: 781). Women quota was implemented easily in the national election since there was not much hope to pass the 10% threshold. However, it became a conflictual issue for the party members in the local election even women were threatened by their men rivals because of they were candidate in the local election (Bozgan; 2011: 783).

The empowerment of women in the party had impacts on the program and statute of the DEHAP and vice versa. As stated earlier, predecessors of DEHAP had only one paragraph on

women in their party programs and that paragraph itself was problematic. However, DEHAP was the first party in the Kurdish political movement that has a comprehensive and strong party program and statute. The DEHAP, in the party program, separates women's rights from human rights as follows:

In the 21st century freedom of women, like human rights, will carry significant importance. The improvement of modern democracy will be seen mostly in the human rights and freedom of women. (DEHAP; 2003: 10).

DEHAP puts freedom of women at the center of its programs. It saw freedom of women as a precondition of democratization by stressing that “freedom of women is the first condition for the democratization of society” and this penetrated into the whole party program. For DEHAP, there were three conflicts which would shape the new century: class conflict, conflict between genders and between nature and humanity (DEHAP; 2003:9-10). In the party program it was stated that the gender conflict has a historical root: “women were excluded from the society historically and the world as such would not solve problems of humanity” .DEHAP engaged with the gender discrimination as a system-related problem. To overcome such problems, DEHAP proposed positive discrimination; a reform in the Political Parties Law; struggle against traditional rules which humiliate women; and implementation of international agreements such as CEDAW, Vienna and Peking Declaration. DEHAP accepted CEDAW as a guideline to abolish all kinds of discriminations against women.

DEHAP placed emphasis on gender in its party statute as well, also in terms of the women's branch. In the “definition of the party” section, DEHAP expressed itself as “...DEHAP, as a leftist mass party, sees the democratization of the society in active participation of women in all aspects of life and their emancipation” (DEHAP; 2003: 73). Perhaps the most interesting article was about violence against women, which was seen as a disciplinary action. DEHAP indicated that “all kinds of violence against women including domestic violence, sexual

abuse, and polygamy” would be regarded as criminal acts if they took place after being a member of the party.

In 2004, DEHAP was abolished by the party organization itself due to the fact that it was not efficient and did not fulfill the increasing demand of the party organization. However, the 2004 election failure was a hidden reason behind the abolishment of the DEHAP. According to Bozgan, the DEHAP was not successful in 2004 elections and women had to pay the bill of that failure by being partially excluded from the new organization called the *Democratic Society's Movement* (Demokratik Toplum Hareketi- DTH), which was changed into Democratic Society's Party (DTP) (Bozgan; 2011: 792, Çağlayan: 2006).

4.4. DTP (Democratic Society's Party) and Co-Chair System

Although, as Bozgan points out some women were excluded from the DTP cadre, there were two significant developments regarding gender equality in this party. The first one was the increasing of the gender quota from 35% to 40%. It should be indicated that gender quota would be applied in case there were enough women candidates. This means that if there were not enough woman candidates, the DTP would accept the existing rate of women. In 2007 national elections, DTP introduced 40% women quota. The DTP went to the election with independent candidates due to the 10% election threshold. Kurdish political movement gained 21 seats in the Turkish parliament and 8 of them were women (38%) (Çağlayan; 2013:121). The gender quota was also introduced in 2009 local elections. However, in these elections, the DTP did not reach 40% quota, and instead, women were represented by 14% by being mayors (Çağlayan; 2013:122).

The second development was the “co-chair” system, which meant that women were represented in all administrative levels and decision-making mechanisms equally. Even though Political Parties Law remained as an obstacle in front of the “co-chair” system,

Kurdish political movement had been implementing the system de facto. In the party statute of the DTP it was stated as:

The DTP defends male-female equality in all aspects of life. To achieve male-female equality in politics, [The DTP] will take all measures. To sustain male-female equality at the highest level, the DTP defends the ‘co-chair’ system and the DTP will struggle for the institutionalization of the ‘co-chair’ system. (DTP party statute; 2005: 123).

In 2014 local elections, Kurdish political movement decided to carry out “co-chair” system not only in the administrative levels like presidency but also at the local level. For example, in 2014 local elections the HDP (People’s Democratic Party) nominated one male and one female candidate for mayorship positions in all cities and districts. According to co-mayor of Nusaybin Cengiz K k, co-chair system does not only sustain gender equality, but it will also be a step to distribute power horizontally which means sharing power with women and all other local people instead concentrated on the hand of one person (Interview with Cengiz K k: 08.01.2015 in Nusaybin). There are also some other interpretations about the implementation of co-chair system except gender equality and extension of power which I got from my informants during my field work in Nusaybin. For example, one view is to sustain check and balance mechanism to prevent corruptions. Another common view is related with the gender equality as creating role models for society to interiorize gender equality.

Co-chair system has been implemented almost in all organizations and institutions of Kurdish movement in leadership positions. Since 2003, co-chair system has been carried out by PKK as well because, as stated earlier, the political ideology of PKK and legal Kurdish politics are mostly parallel to each other. Although co-chair system has been applied in the Green Parties in Europe and the United States for years, there has been an interpretation among some of Kurdish activists that only the Kurdish political movement achieved to apply co-chair

system.⁴² Although this interpretation is wrong, the Kurdish political movement has been very successful to spread the co-chair system in all its organizations and institutions. Even though there are many problems about the implementation of the co-chair system in practice due to its not being legally recognized, the Kurdish political movement insists to continue and spread it in all its branches. The most important step of Kurdish movement about co-chair system is to perform it in local administrative units which are under the power of the Kurdish political movement. Kurdish women whom I interviewed claimed that the women's policy of the Kurdish political movement will be a role model for Turkish politics regarding the representation of women in the parliament. When analyzing the candidates of forthcoming election in June 2015, it will be realized that representation of women is very high when compared to past elections.⁴³ HDP's women candidate rate has an impact on the representation of women in other political parties too. Mencütek confirms this view by arguing that "in order to compete with the BDP during the 2011 elections, the AKP imitated the former by placing women candidates in those provinces where the BDP had a female MP. Similarly, the CHP enhanced its voluntary quota implementation in March 2012" (Mencütek; 2015: 7).

Gender equality has a significant impact on both the party program and statute of the DTP. Similar to DEHAP, the DTP stated that "women are the fundamental dynamic of democratization":

The DTP sees overcoming obstacles of women which hinder them from participating in political and social life as an obligatory duty. Up until conditions which prevent women to participate in the decision making process and its practice removed, positive discrimination principle will be implemented in all grounds. Furthermore, 40% gender

⁴² During my field work in Nusaybin, I asked a question on co-chair system and my interviewees mostly stated that co-chair system has been implemented only by Kurdish political movement around the world. They point out that it indicates how much the Kurdish political movement cares about the women's issue.

⁴³ The number of women candidates are listed as HDP 48%, CHP 18%, AKP 18% and MHP 9%.
<http://t24.com.tr/haber/hangi-parti-kac-kadin-aday-gosterdi,292863>

quota will apply in all administrative levels of the party (DTP party program; 2005: 24-25).

In the party program of the DTP, there was a transformation on the role of family and women in the society. As stated in the earlier part of this chapter, in HEP's party program there was only one paragraph on women's rights and that paragraph also continued with the "protection of the family" section, where motherhood was a natural and societal duty of women. It can be problematic that women were only positioned in the family. However, the DTP saw the family as the first space which produces gender inequality, and for this reason, gender roles in the traditional family structure should be democratized. As opposed to the "protection of the family" in HEP and DEP, DTP stated that "the most important problem for emancipation of women in the consecrated family structure which produces and reproduces the gender roles"

(DTP party program; 2005:23).

DTP was banned by unanimity of votes of Constitutional Court of Turkey in 2009, court president Haşim Kılıç stated the reasons of ban as:

"It has been decided the DTP will be closed under Articles 68 and 69 of the Constitution and the Political Parties Law given that actions and statements made by the party became a focal point for terrorism against the indivisible integrity of the state,"⁴⁴

3.5. BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) and HDP (People's Democratic Party)

The BDP succeeded the DTP after the closure of the party. The BDP's women's policy was similar to the DTP. For instance, their mottos were the same: "women are the fundamental dynamic of democratization". BDP also indicated that "to achieve gender equality, BDP will support co-chair system". BDP continued to improve "women-friendly" policies both at local

⁴⁴ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=constitutional-court-votes-to-xx-turkey-pro-kurdish-part-2009-12-11>

and national politics as well. Some important developments of the BDP can be summarized as follows: “when a male and a female candidate receive the same number of votes in intra-party elections for leadership positions, the woman is assigned the position, and the party registration fee for prospective female members is lower than the fee for men” (Mencütek; 2015: 7). These policies encourage and increase women’s participation to politics because, first, women’s economic conditions could be obstacle for women to be candidate and second, women were encouraged to be a candidate against men.

In the party program and statute of the BDP, there was a strong emphasis on the economic and social rights of women. Firstly, in the party statute it was stated that “all income including public treasury will be distributed among the party’s branches and 15% of all party’s income will be given to women assembly” (BDP party statute; 2008). In addition to that, to increase women employment the BDP proposed 50% gender quota in all public positions. The BDP had some articles in its party program and statute that freed women from their traditional social duties like childcare. For childcare the BDP stated that “Free kindergarten will be provided through public and private financing” (BDP party program: 2008). Furthermore, the BDP claimed to change the social security system in favor of women, because according to current social security system lots of women depend on their fathers’ or their husbands’ social security. In the party program it was stated as “our party will make essential revisions to provide social security rights for all women as an individual.” (BDP party program: 2008).

The BDP also carried out some women-friendly policies in its municipalities, which were regarded very radical,. For example, the BDP municipalities, especially those which were run by woman mayors, put an article on the labor agreement that half of the wage of the men personnel who used violence against their wives, would be given to their wives. Furthermore, municipality personnel who did not send his/her daughters to the school, would not be given the social aid which was given for his/her son anymore (Çağlayan; 2013:134-135). In addition

to those women friendly improvements, the BDP municipalities had afforded to increase women personnel and opened position for women to sustain gender equality. For instance, Van, Özalp and Cizre municipalities employed women for being municipal polices which was seen as an unusual job for women by Kurdish society.

The BDP also put gender education for all party's members on its agenda. In the party's "school of politics" which was mixed, the gender class was one of the first lessons (Çağlayan; 2013: 134). In addition to the gender class there was a "women's academia" that only party women could attend and receive ideological and gender education. Öcalan's writings are also one of the fundamental sources of the women academia in addition to well-known feminist writers like Judith Butler and Fatmagül Berktay.

The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) was founded in 2012. HDP originated in the Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK) which is a platform that consisted of many left-wing political parties, groups and organizations such as *Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party*, *Labour Party*, *Socialist Party of the Oppressed*, *Socialist Democracy Party*, *Socialist Party of Refoundation*, *the Greens* and *the Left Party of the Future*, *the Peace and Democracy Party*, and feminist groups, LGBTI groups and some trade unions. During and after the 2014 local election BDP and HDP were in the joint structure. However, in April 2014 all deputies of the BDP joined the HDP, and BDP was represented only at the local administrative level. In July 2014, BDP changed its name to the Democratic Regions Party (DBP). The Turkish public saw this shift as Kurdish political movement's wanting to change its perception to Kurdish nationalism. For this reason, Kurdish political movement desired to get out of that perception and "HDP project" was proposed as "Turkey's party" to go beyond the Turkish and Kurdish dichotomy.

In its party program, HDP called for women to organize and struggle for their double exploitation both in public and private spheres. HDP stated that “Our party will be in struggle to make women’s labor visible and organized, [we] will be also in struggle against double exploitation of women.” (HDP Party Program: 2012). As opposed to its predecessor parties, the HDP proposed to empower local politics to enhance participation of women to politics more actively and directly. HDP called women to establish “women’s assemblies” locally and these assemblies will carry women-related problems and women’s demand to the municipalities, general provincial councils and all other local administrative units (HDP Party Program: 2012). The HDP’s objective is to decentralize politics and break male dominance in politics. For Kurdish political movement decentralization will provide a ground for women to do politics more actively and have chance to express herself on her environment. Different from other traditional pro-Kurdish political parties, HDP argues that “to struggle against gender equality is our party’s main duty, starting from our own organizational structure and all other sexist relations and languages” (HDP Party Program: 2012). In its party program the HDP stated that abortion is a woman’s right and in the sexual violence-harassment cases women’s statement should be the essential one.

Perhaps the most important reform both in the party program and statute of the HDP is on LGBT’s rights. The HDP points out that:

“Our party sees heterosexism as a kind of racism. [Our Party] struggles against homophobia and transphobia based discrimination and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexuals (LGBT). Our party defends that emancipation of LGBT will emancipate heterosexuals too, our party is in the struggle against hate speech and hate crime which impose and show heterosexism as obligatory” (HDP Party Program: 2012).

In the party statute, in the party’s definition section the HDP introduces itself as:

The party is a political party which aims to democratize oppressed and exploited people’s power,; the excluded and ignored peoples and religious communities, women’, workers, peasants, young, unemployed, retired, disabled, LGBT (Lesbian,

Gay, Bisexual, Trans), immigrants ...[The Party] engages in a struggle with all these people to diminish exploitation and discrimination... (HDP Party Statute: 2012).

To conclude this part, it should be noted that there was no abrupt change on women's policy of the pro-Kurdish political parties. Instead, it has been developed historically and gradually. However, when one compares the first pro-Kurdish political party, HEP, with parties that were founded after the 2000s it will be seen that there is a transformation on their women's policies. The reasons behind this transformation could be listed as the increasing number of women in the Kurdish political movement; women's struggle against the male-dominant party structure, and the role of Öcalan's ideology which situated women in the center. However, the analyses of pro-Kurdish political parties' programs and statutes and the Kurdish movement's ideology are not solely enough to explain participation of Kurdish women in local politics; it requires women's own experiences, witnesses and narratives to reveal women's agency. In the next chapter, experiences of Kurdish women in local politics in the case of Nusaybin will analyze to understand the social political dynamics behind their participation in local politics.

CHAPTER 5: EXPERIENCES OF KURDISH WOMEN IN POLITICS IN NUSAYBIN

In this chapter, I will analyze my findings from the interviews conducted with the politically involved Kurdish women in Nusaybin. Given this thesis' specific attention to the Kurdish women's movement in Nusaybin, a brief introduction about the social, political and geographical context of Nusaybin would be useful. Nusaybin is located in the Dicle area of Southeast Anatolia and more specifically in the southeast of Mardin, constituting one of its nine districts. Nusaybin is surrounded by Midyat from the north, Şırnak from the east, downtown Mardin from the west and Qamishli from the south (Figure 1).

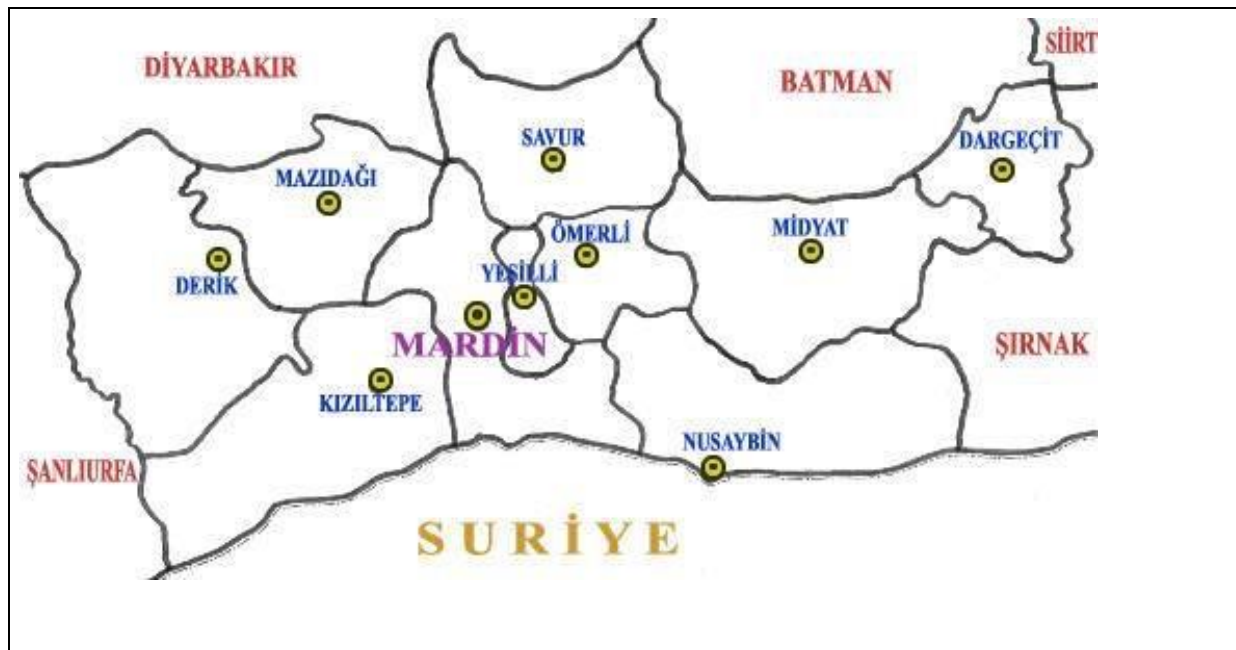


Figure 1: Mardin and its nine districts, including Nusaybin.

The population of Nusaybin had reached to 116.068 in 2014 (TUİK).⁴⁵ Nusaybin has been known as an ancient cosmopolitan town due to the diverse ethnic and religious makeup of its inhabitants, comprising of many communities such as Assyrians, Chaldeans, Armenians, Yezidis, Arabs, Turks and Kurds. However, the city gradually lost a considerable amount of

⁴⁵ <http://www.webcitation.org/6WFDKzgm>.

its inhabitants, especially after the start of the armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state where many people were forced to migrate from Nusaybin. Non-Muslim minority groups on the other hand mostly emigrated due to the pressure they felt because of both their ethnic and religious identities. Although Kurdish migration to metropolises of Turkey has also been underway, asymmetrical emigration of non-Muslim communities rendered contemporary Nusaybin mostly a Kurdish city. This was even further corroborated when some Kurds who had previously migrated to the cities returned to their hometown in the aftermath of the transformation of the armed conflict into a negotiation process.

Nusaybin is a border town whose geographic characteristic affects its social, cultural, political, and economic features. For example, Qamishli is clearly visible from the city center of Nusaybin. Indeed, the border socially divides the territory that contains the two towns into *Serxet* ('above the border' in Kurdish) and *Binxet* ('under the border' in Kurdish). One of my informants explained this as following:

When day turns into night I look at the other side and when I see that they do not have light, I become very upset. I say 'They once again do not have electricity' and I start to wonder why. So we are not far from them. Lots of our relatives live there; my mother and father have lots of relatives there. (Ceylan (39), Nusaybin)

Inhabitants of both of the towns are mostly relatives and some still have lands on the other side of the border. According to the residents of Nusaybin, they are a people of one city, divided by a border.

As smuggling has been the main economic activity of the town, Nusaybin's economy also depends on the border. There are numerous shopping markets (*pasaj*) in the town center, where goods smuggled from Syria (such as fabrics, electronic appliances, cosmetics, coffee, tea, etc.) are being sold. The ongoing war in Syria however interrupted smuggling activities in Nusaybin. Agriculture and livestock breeding constitute the other economic activities people engage in in Nusaybin. It is important to note that many young people still continue to

migrate to metropolitan cities like Istanbul, Izmir and Manisa to work as seasonal workers in textile industry or agriculture.

Nusaybin is one the places where the Kurdish political movement has been very powerful since the 1990s. Pro-Kurdish political parties have received the majority of votes in Nusaybin in both local and general elections since 1991 (See Figure 2).

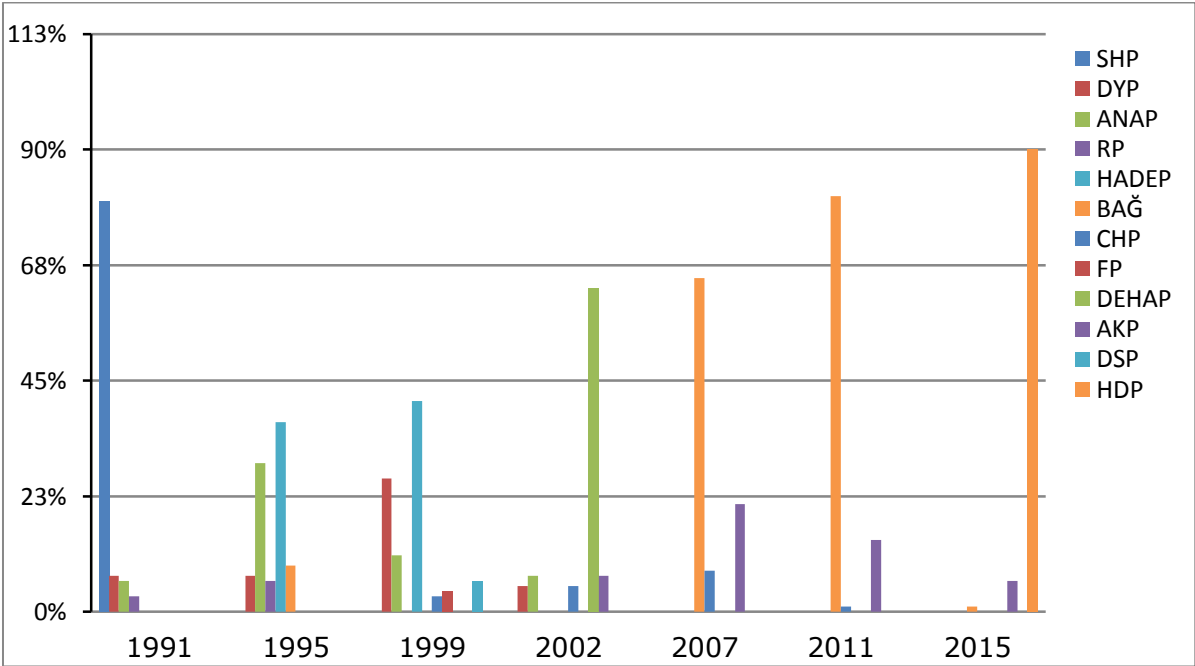


Figure 2: Vote rates of pro-Kurdish political parties in Nusaybin in general elections (1991-2015).

Although Nusaybin is usually known for its mass political activities in the 1990s, the town had been very politically active as early as the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1970s there were several active Kurdish political parties in Turkey and many of those parties were inspired by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and later on by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) from Iraq (Jongerden and Akkaya, 2010: 125).

The geographical location of Nusaybin had also political influences on the town in addition to abovementioned social, cultural and economic ones. As a border town, Nusaybin became a place of political transmittal from Syria to Turkey (and vice versa), from Iraq to Turkey or

from Turkey to Palestinian guerilla camps. Uncle Mehmet, a 70 years-old male informant remembered these from the political atmosphere of the 1970s' Nusaybin:

In 1976, many young university students came from diverse cities, from all over the region and most of them were children of famous families. My younger brother was also one of them and they wanted me to hide them on my land until they pass the border to go to Palestinian camps for guerrilla training. I made a kind of shelter for them on my land and in there, every night they had discussions about various topics which amazed me. ... At that time there was no PKK yet, it was before PKK. There were KDP, KUK, Ala Rizgari, Kawa and many other Kurdish parties at that time. (Uncle Mehmet, 07.01.2015, Nusaybin)

Some of my informants started their personal history of political participation by noting that “all my family used to support Barzani in the 1970s, but then guerrillas came to our village and we knew them and supported them too. However my father is still a Barzani sympathizer,” (Arife (48), Nusaybin). As mentioned in previous chapters, with the 1980 coup d'état all those legal and illegal parties had to withdraw from Turkey except the PKK. In the 1990s, an intensive armed conflict broke out between the PKK and the Turkish state in eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey, regions which are predominantly Kurdish. With the armed conflict, many villages were evacuated by the Turkish army.⁴⁶ Villagers were accused of supporting the PKK and many executions and disappearances were documented also in the urban centers.

In the beginning of the 1990s, the evacuation of villages, extrajudicial killings, and pressures of the army resulted in *serhildan* (a Kurdish word means uprising, akin to Palestinian *intifada* in meaning) against the state in some of the southeastern cities and districts of Turkey. Nusaybin and Cizre districts took the leading role as sites of *Serhildans* on the 1992 *Newroz* celebrations. According to local newspapers more than 100 people were killed by the Turkish

⁴⁶ There is no consensus on the number of the evacuated villages and perpetrators. For example whereas Göç-
Der cites more than 3.500 villages that were evacuated by the state forces, the state officials have never
acknowledged the act and they, for years, accused the PKK for evacuations.

forces in Şırnak, Cizre and Nusaybin during the celebrations of that year. The events were reported in the local newspaper:

In the events, which started on the 21st of March in Cizre, according to officials, 57 people including a journalist were killed by the police and special teams. However, the number of deaths was more than the official ones. On the first day, almost 100 people were killed in Şırnak city center. The day after, in Nusaybin people wanted to protest the violence of police and special teams and hundreds of people marched. Police drove their panzers on the protesters and some were shot down by automatic guns, resulting in 16 deaths and 106 severely injured.⁴⁷

The 1992 Newroz has an important place, which denotes state violence, in the collective memory of Cizre and Nusaybin. In the aftermath of these events, Kurdish –both legal and illegal– political movement raised its legitimacy and power in these places. The state’s repression ironically created a space for mobilization for the Kurdish movement in Cizre and Nusaybin. This situation could be evaluated, in Tilly’s parlance, as “repression shaping mobilization, mobilization shaping repression,” (Tilly, 2005: 212).

Although during my interviews I did not ask any direct questions about the 1992 Newroz, many of my respondents started recounting their political past with that event. For instance, Şehriban identified it as her first political event: “I got married 3 months before the Nusaybin *Serhildan*. So, that was my first time being in the protest. My husband beat me because I went there with my wedding jewelries. I decided to join the PKK along with the daughter of my brother in law. However, they did not accept me because I was married,” (Gülşah (45), Nusaybin).

The political atmosphere of Nusaybin and Cizre mobilized not only men but also women. In her comprehensive book on the Kurdish women’s movement, Çağlayan points out that the main success of the Kurdish political movement in the 1990s was its ability to mobilize women en mass. According to her, women had mobilized in that period due to the fact that men were already under harsh repression of the state. Men were killed, jailed and

⁴⁷ <http://www.cizrepostasi.com/1992-cizre-newrozunun-taniklari-anlatti-18383h.htm>.

disappeared. For that reason it was women, who had to struggle to find their relatives, follow juridical processes and go to prison gates (2007:138). Women also came into contact with some human rights associations like IHD (Human Rights Association) and political parties for the first time to bring up their voice in public. In addition to these, Kurdish women held protests and demonstrations in order to make their voice heard in public. *Cumartesi Anneleri* (Saturday Mothers) and *Barış Anneleri* (Mothers of Peace) had formed in that period by mostly mothers of disappeared persons and Kurdish mothers who lost their children on the ongoing war.

Keeping these socio-political features of Nusaybin in mind, in the following part I will discuss and analyze women's political participation in Nusaybin. How women themselves make sense of their political participation in Nusaybin can be probed by using five general themes. First, the ways in which women get involved in politics and strategies that women use to participate in the political sphere. The second set of questions deals with the extent to which the Kurdish movement affected political participation of women and with the way the women identify their political activism before and after the Kurdish movement. The third one is about the women's perception of party men's reaction to their political participation: Is there any tension between men and women with regard to women's role in the party or do men readily accept the Kurdish movement's policy without any reservations? Next theme is on the relationship between women and the state and its institutions such as police and courts. How do women see these state institutions and what kind of relationship they establish with them? Finally, the last theme is whether the relationship between the women and the municipality improved, especially after a female mayor came to Nusaybin and whether this affected women's political participation not. All these themes will be discussed and analyzed in detailed below.

5.1. Political participation of women in Nusaybin

Before moving on to my analysis of women's political participation in Nusaybin, I would like to explicate what I mean by politics and political participation. Louise Tilly and Patricia Gurin argue for a broader conception of political participation. For them, it is inappropriate to evaluate politics only in the legal context and only to its legitimate extend (e.g. voting, campaigning and initiating contact with officials); in other words, with limited activities within the system (Tilly and Gurin, 1992:5). Their proposed definition of politics contains both collective action and the "effort to affect the distribution of power and resources in a state community," (*Ibid*:6). Although this thesis will follow their definition of politics and political participation, I want to expand on two reservations I have about Tilly and Gurin's conception. First, they claim that "very little collective action is not politics ... like rock festivals ..." and secondly, they continue: "Power struggles in the family are also excluded from our definition of politics," (*Ibid*:6). I find the second point especially objectionable in light of the feminist dictum which claims that "the personal is political", rendering the struggle in the family also political. In the scope of this study, I understand political participation as something more than voting, party memberships, and activities influencing government's policies. Any kind of activity, which changes or influences women's roles in daily and political life qualifies as political participation. Furthermore, I find it essential to consider how women explain and perceive their own political participation. In other words, we need to explore whether women perceive their activities such as marches, demonstrations as political or not in the first place.

"When did you get involved in politics?" is an impractical question to ask to any woman or man in Nusaybin as there usually is no exact time or a single event. The answers are usually a

variation on the theme that ‘in this geography it is impossible not to get involved in politics because one is born with and grow up in politics.’ Some answers of my respondents are:

We, Kurds and Kurdish women, already were born into politics. You could not chance to live another life. Because you were born into this, for example, your family and environment are like this. So in some way, since you were born into that you shape according to that. Kurdishness is a kind of costume that you wear because you are born as a Kurd. (Saadet (28), Nusaybin)

We are always engaging with politics because I was born in a family that is very interested in it. I was very lucky because we were learning about our Kurdishness when we were growing up. So, when you grow up in this way you cannot stay away from politics. (Ceylan (39), Nusaybin)

Actually, when our children get born and open their eyes to life, we teach them who they are because they are born into the struggle. (Leyla (41), Nusaybin)

This situation refers to the political nature of the families in which these women grew up. In other words, if one grows up in a family whose members (usually the father or brothers) are politically engaged, he or she meets politics thanks to family members. However, women do not always have the chance to participate in politics along with their male relatives in majority of the politically-engaged families since such political activities are sometimes deemed inappropriate for women. Yüksel reminds us of the strong sexist, inegalitarian and male-chauvinist approach of the Kurdish political movement to Kurdish women, despite its intentions to mobilize them (Yüksel: 777). 27 years old Berivan explains her experience in the following words:

As I told you, my family is a patriotic family; two of my brothers are martyrs but in spite of their (family members) patriotism and martyrs, they do not show this to you (women). Because women are still under every kind of oppression and if they want to be free family puts hundred obstacles in front of women. For example, the first time I was working until midnight my family created obstacles and problems for me ... According to them, okay, women can work outside but they should lead a normal life; they should marry at one point. (Berivan (27), Nusaybin)

Çağlayan (2007) states that women, who participate in the Kurdish political movement, are generally members of families that “pay the price of war” by deaths, enforced disappearing,

and getting arrested. Those families are called *değer aileleri* ('value families').⁴⁸ In *değer aileleri* as women lose their relatives like their husbands, sons or brothers, they seek after their male relatives and this process allows women to meet with political organizations, parties, and human rights organizations. Perhaps *Cumartesi Anneleri* (Saturday Mothers) and *Barış Anneleri* (Peace Mothers) exemplify this process best. One of my respondents, Gülşah, indicates that women can participate in politics as long as they do not have men in their lives and continues:

I am not sure whether I should say this or not but honestly women who join the party are mostly widows, divorced women or Mothers of Peace... Lots of them (women) have martyrs, guerillas and those women work very hard and nobody objects to those women... I will tell you this, if a woman has a mother in law, a father in law or a husband, that woman would not be able to engage in politics... Women who are divorced like me can come (to the party) otherwise married or woman with children cannot come here. (Gülşah (45), Nusaybin)

Bozgan dubs mobilization of those women in the Kurdish political movement "an accidental activism" (2011: 772). Even though this view ignores women's agency in their political participation, her qualification demands attention, because in the 1990s women indeed dealt with politics for two main reasons. First, they had to get their voice heard in public in order to learn about their male relatives' situation. In relation to the first reason, secondly, in the 1990s men did not prefer to go the state institutions to ask for their relatives because they were afraid that they would meet the same fate as their relatives if they had gone to the state and asked about their dead, disappeared or arrested relatives. Since women were not considered as interlocutors by the state officers, it was therefore generally the women who went to the state institutions asking about their relatives' fate. Havva, a 50 years-old woman, started talking

⁴⁸ *Değer Aileleri* is a named used for families that lost one or more family members during the armed conflict between the Turkish military forces and the PKK. A family who has a prisoned member also qualifies as a *değer ailesi*. However, an informal hierarchy exists among *değer aileleri*. For example, if a family had lost more than one family member, that family is esteemed more highly than a family that lost only one member. These families are regarded as the ones who pay the price of war and it is for this reason that they are respected among local people and the Kurdish political movement in general.

about her political participation by asking how could one not engage in politics in the face of the oppression they had faced:

Our friends (sympathizers of the Kurdish political movement) were under very harsh oppression and they were tortured. Turks did that to them. For example, if they (the state forces) come and take my husband from home, of course, I would go out to ask for him. For instance, if they take my son, I will do my best to find him (Havva (50), Nusaybin).

In 1992, my husband was arrested and for three days we did not hear anything from him, then we learned that he was in prison in Çankırı (they live in İzmir). Until then, I had never been interested in party's activities even though my husband was engaged in them, because I was raising three children and was a working-woman. When my husband was arrested I went to the party and when I went there, a hunger strike to protest the arrestments was organized. I went home, took my children and joined the hunger strike without anyone asking me to do so. That was my first experience in the party. ... After the hunger strike, they (the party) asked me to join the women's commission and I accepted it. I have been in the party, first in İzmir and then in Nusaybin, since that time. (Ayla (53), Nusaybin)

As stated above, although the Kurdish women in the 1990s got involved in politics only “accidentally”, in the interviews I have conducted in Nusaybin, I realize that nowadays, women make an effort to stay in the political sphere. Like in Ayla's story, once women start to participate in politics, this new area offers them a different world outside their home and they particularly do not want to give up this new world. Therefore recently, unlike the 1990s, some women have been struggling to do politics in spite of the obstacles coming from their families and society. Next, I will try to point out to some strategies these women use in order to become politically active and then stay that way.

5.1.1. Women's strategies for political participation

In the post-conflict literature, it is stated that although women are one of the active participants of conflicts and wars, when the situation is alleviated or when it comes to peace negotiations women are usually sent back home (Augustin, 1993; Cockburn, 1999). For the Kurdish case, the situation still cannot be judged to be in the post-conflict phase despite the state initiatives (such as *Democratic Opening*, *Kurdish Opening* and *Solution Process*) that

aim at normalization. Consequently it would be misleading to expect that Kurdish women would withdraw from the political scene. However I have observed that engaging in politics is much harder for a younger generation of women than it had been for the women of the 1990s. Unless they are a member of a *değer ailesi*, this new generation of women is expected to have a good reason to be politically active. One such good reason, for example, is employment: After the municipal election in which the Kurdish political movement took over many of the municipalities in the region, these places became a power center in the cities and districts of, especially in relation to employment for municipalities. For this reason, conducting good relationships with the municipalities and the Party became a means to be employed. This is especially the case for the families who are aware of the Kurdish political movement's employment policy of a 40% quota for women in all positions including the municipality. As the municipalities prefer to hire people who are related to the Party in one way or another, those families want their daughters to cultivate good relations with the Party. For example, one of the residents of the neighborhood I had stayed in during my field work, once told me that the neighborhood's *imam* had sent his daughter to the Party only for her to find a job and that he would have not otherwise ever allowed her to mix with the men there.

Since the 1990s, women members of *değer aileleri* strategically use their position in order to participate in political activities. Some of my respondents use statements like, "How could I be away from this struggle after I lost my brother" or "My husband's family does not stop me from going to the party, because I have lots of martyrs in my family". In the eyes of these families, the title of *değer ailesi* functions as a legitimizing factor for women to participate in politics, who otherwise would have had to struggle much more to do so. For instance Sakine, one of my respondents, indicates that:

We, as a family, have always been in the (Kurdish) movement. ... One day in 1992, at 2 or 3 a.m., my sister's husband was killed by the state in their house in front of his three children and wife. This event deeply affected our family as whole. ... That

experience brought me closer and closer to the struggle. I cannot stay away when I think about him. (Sakine (34), Nusaybin)

Not all women from *değer aileleri* can find a chance to be politically active though and these women have to use other strategies to bypass their families and husbands. Havva Abla, a 50 years-old informant, recounts that even though her brother is a martyr, when she went to the Party her husband used to always get very angry with her and she would find herself having fight with him. In the end she found a way to convince her husband with an administrative role in the Party:

The Party offered me the administrator position. I accepted it without asking my husband. When I came home and told him that I joined the Party administration, he told me that he wouldn't want this and that I had the children's responsibility. So he was angry with me. I knew that the Party was looking for a *çaycı* (an office worker who is responsible for preparing and serving tea/coffee) so I went there and said to the Party leader: "If you hire my husband as *çaycı* we will come here together and he will see what kind of place is here." They hired him as *çaycı* and then he softened. (Havva (50), Nusaybin.)

Saadet, another of my respondents, says that when she was a teenager, her family and friends used to call her 'tomboy'. She admits that she uses the very same label herself. In her own words: "I use that label as a shield, I use it. I stay more powerful. ... Thanks to that label, I can do the things that they associate with men."

According to Çağlayan, women benefit from and use the discourse of equality propagated by the Kurdish political movement. Along with 'freedom', 'equality' is a concept that is frequently referred to by the Kurdish political movement and it is through this discourse that women are often able to carve out a space for themselves. For example, during my field work most of my informants noted that "if we (women) are equal with men why only they (men) take the high positions in the Party structure such as being a member of the administrative unit, being the president, mayor or *mukhtar*." 58 years-old Emine Anne, who is one the Peace Mothers, stated that:

If we are equal with men, why do we always stay at home and raise children, wash the dirty socks of men? We can do politics better than men because we have the courage and we are mothers. Our leader (Öcalan) paves the way for women to participate in politics, so no one can stop us. (Emine (58), Nusaybin)

Although the women emphasize equality with men when it comes to political participation, it is evident that they do engage in politics in the same ways that men do. Women do not necessarily get rid of their domestic responsibilities such as raising children when they participate in political activities and therefore find themselves doing a double shift. Therefore, especially the women who are in the administrative units of the Party or who work there as an active member, have to fulfill both their responsibility at home and in the Party. This double shift turns into one of the conditions for women to become politically active as it became clear during some of my interviews I have conducted with men. When I asked men whether they allowed their wife to engage in politics, they generally had no problems with the idea as long as the women did not neglect their housework and children. This double shift exhausts women as it becomes apparent in the accounts of Sakine and Ceylan:

I know I wake up at 6-7 a.m. in the morning. I cook dinner, do cleaning, wash clothes and do the ironing. Actually, I am someone who works 24 hours. You know, I do all of my chores and then I come here (the Party). I do this only to fulfill my husband and children's needs. I cannot choose one of them. I should maintain both of these works at the same time and this wears me a lot. I swear, I lost 8 kilograms in one and a half month. (Sakine (34), Nusaybin)

Look, I wake up at 5 a.m. Do you know what I do? I cook some of the dinner, now I will go back to do the rest. I vacuum the house. I feed my little son and dress him up. I even prepare the food that the babysitter gives him during the day. (Güler (34), Nusaybin)

When it comes to this double burden, there are generational differences among women. Whereas young women generally have to do the double shift in order to participate in political activities, old women are usually not responsible for the housework and the childcare as it is mostly their daughters and daughters-in-law who are responsible for domestic work. Women, in a way, take turns (*nöbetleşe*): Old or middle aged women transfer their responsibilities to

the younger ones in order to be active in the Party. Gülşah's story shows us how this practically works:

There is no girl like my eldest girl in the world. She is very talented in housework and cooking. She can cook all meals. She wakes up everyday at 5 a.m. and prepares breakfast for her siblings and then sends them to school. She helps me a lot. Yesterday, some young members of the Party came and asked her to get involved in the youth activities in the Party. I asked them, "I'm active in the Party. Who will take care of the other children if she comes there?" (Gülşah (45), Nusaybin)

Arife's story is much different than other women's. When doctors told Arife that she could never give birth to a child, her husband got married to another woman. Now, Ayşe, who is Arife's *kuma* (co-wife), has three children and all of them live together. Arife explains: "We (Arife and Ayşe) share our work. I am responsible for the work outside and she is responsible for the housework and the childcare." During our interview with Arife, Ayşe prepared fruits and tea for us and never spoke. At the end of the interview I asked Ayşe if she would be willing to talk. She told me the following: "I do not understand anything about politics. She (Arife) knows everything more than me, because both of us cannot go to the party. I should stay home."

These accounts paint a picture of the hierarchy among women of different ages and statuses: In Nusaybin, women, who are older and have higher status (i.e. mothers, mothers-in-law), are much more likely to politically active. This also draws attention on the power relation among women themselves. For example, older women, women who are member of "değer ailesi" and educated women have more chance to involve in politics. In other words, these women do not have to struggle as women except this conceptualization.

5.1.2. Women empowerment through political participation

Why do these women want to participate in politics to the extent that they would use strategies and accept double shifts in order to do so? The answer to this question, of course, is manifold. A common-sense answer would point out to the fact that women, constituting half

of the world's population, just want to be equal to men and have the same rights that men cherish in every stage of their lives. However, women in Nusaybin have a much more concrete motivation to have a say in the political arena along with more general motivations: As it comes up in many of the interviews I have conducted during my research, political participation provides a novel space from women in Nusaybin for going out from their houses for once in order to forget about their daily problems and to feel proud of themselves for the social work they do. Many women recounted that their experience in politics divided their lives into two: before politics and after politics. For them, political activity has been a life-changing experience. Self-admittedly, they started not to accept domestic violence, they became more powerful in fighting against their problems, and they started to help their environment:

The things that I told you are only a very small part of what I've gone through. I've seen too much torment. I faced torment from my family, from his (husband) family. 5 years ago, I went out. You know I forget all about these when I am doing the Party work. ... I tell this to Kurdish women, if I had gone out and mixed with the crowd earlier, if I had met this struggle and politics earlier, I would have never fallen into those mistakes. I'd never have accepted that oppression. When women come to me and I listen their problems, I forget all about that miserable life. (Safiye (40), Nusaybin)

Now, if I start to tell you about the things which I went through, the cassettes will not be enough (for recording). So let me tell you everything superficially. ... I had been married for 22 years and all those years I did not have even a single day without crying. He had been beating me everyday. After 22 years I divorced him, but if I had my current knowledge then, I would have never endured that torture. ... Now, there is a lot of Party work and I'm doing them. Thanks to them, I forget my daily life, I forget the bad memories from those days. (Gülşah (45), Nusaybin)

Think about it: a 14 years-old girl was given to a 30 years-old man. I was a child and he was a grown-up man. That created a lot of problems in my life. ... You know, my husband used to use violence against me very often without any reason. I made an effort to stop that violence a very long time and I stopped it. It's been 10 years that this had stopped physically; he has not raised his hand. Yet you can't stop everything, psychological violence for example. ... When you are in that situation, you always miss something about the outside. In my view many women become politically active for this reason. This new life brings you freedom even though, I think, I'm still not free, because there is still someone I should give account to such as my husband, my children, my father. (Sakine (34), Nusaybin)

Most of the women point out to the fact that becoming politically active empowered them to solve their own problems and even help others against domestic violence, child marriage, bride price, etc. Although this new space renders these women more conscious about their lives, it also creates distinctions among them. This political space divides women in Nusaybin into two: ‘the Party women’ who are politically active and other women who are not engaged in politics. The politically active women state that ‘other women’ differentiate themselves by considering them very powerful, but thinking that themselves are not:

My neighbors always tell me, “You can do everything!” I tell them, “You also can do the things I do.” Their response is “We are not like you.” (Güler (34), Nusaybin)

I always tell women “Do not let your husbands use violence against you; be powerful against them.” They answer me, “You are successful so you expect the same thing from us, but we are not like you.” No, this is totally wrong. All of them are more conscious than me, they know more than me but they prisoned themselves into their houses. (Safiye (40), Nusaybin)

Berivan said that ‘the other women’, who do not have the chance to come to the Party, see ‘the Party women’ as free and different than themselves. However, I have observed that those ‘Party women’ are in fact very similar to others when it comes to their lifestyles, education, and even economic status. The only perceivable difference is the fact that ‘the Party women’ had created a new space for themselves outside of their home. This new space transforms women and provides new opportunities for them, thus empowering women. Perhaps, one of the most salient outcomes of this empowerment is women gaining an awareness about their gender. Even though this gender awareness sometimes turns into a notion of “women sanctity”, for most of the women, it means solidarity of women against both men and the state. In Nusaybin, women struggle against not only the male domestic violence but also the state’s. For majority of ‘the Party women’, the masculine mentality of men parallels that of the state. Men want to dominate and oppress women whereas the state tries to dominate the Kurdish people:

Men (Kurdish) are slave of the state and women are slave of both the state and men ... For example, the Turkish state tries to prevent our (the Kurds') development. Men do the same thing for women. For this reason we, women, should always support ourselves, we have to be hand in hand to prevent men's dictatorship and violence. (Emine (58), Nusaybin)

If you look at a normal woman, a woman who is not Kurdish, she only fights against men. We, the Kurdish women fight both against the system and men. This is a very hard struggle but not an impossible one, because the Kurdish women now are in the struggle and they will accomplish this. (Berivan (27), Nusaybin)

Although most of 'the Party women' view their gender in a political manner, slight inter-generational differences start to appear when it comes to feminism. When reflecting on the issue, Nadjé al-Ali states that "due to the stigmatization of feminism in the Middle East, the terms 'feminist' or 'feminism' are rarely used and women adopt a variety of labels to describe the objectives of their activism" (2000: 47). During my fieldwork, I have never asked my participants their opinions about feminism unless they brought up the issue themselves. Feminism has an intensely negative connotation for older women. For most of them, it is something 'dangerous' and they associate it with single women who are against marriage and men in general. However this is not the case for the young women, who are usually much more open to feminist ideas. Indeed two of my young respondents introduced themselves as feminist. Here is one my older informant's response, followed by self-identified feminists':

For example, I really value women and help women but I am against feminism. For me, there is no life without men nor without women. Without either of the sexes, there would be no children and life would stop. (Safiye (40), Nusaybin)

I see myself as a feminist even though I could not practice it 100% in my life. For me it is not something bad. It is supporting women rights, equality. That's how I see it. ... In our society feminism is perceived as opposing men, not as supporting women rights. That's why people do not see this (feminism) as a normal, a good thing. (Berivan (27), Nusaybin)

In our society feminism has always been misunderstood. I'm a feminist but why am I feminist? Because I think women have the same rights as men even if they are two different species. (Saadet (28), Nusaybin)

Although the women in Nusaybin acknowledge and are aware of gender inequalities, they nevertheless do not question all the gender roles associated with men and women. In their

narratives, women state that “women can do everything and should do everything just like men do”, but when it comes to men, women say that “we should not expect men to wash dishes, do cooking, or take care of children. These are not some jobs that men can do”. Therefore, it would be far-fetched to conclude that political participation of women automatically transforms gender roles in Nusaybin. Of course, women’s participation itself demonstrates a degree of transformation in gender roles, but this is in no way a general one. Women evaluate the kind of jobs that are associated with women as very basic ones and do not necessarily think that a change concerning these jobs are necessary for equality:

I know lots of women who by equality understand making their husbands wash the dishes. But I am against this. I do not want them (men) washing dishes. Women’s jobs are different than men’s. Is freedom making men washing dishes? ... Yes, politics is women’s job. If men do not prevent us, women can do everything. (Gülşah (45), Nusaybin)

Women should be aware of this: Men are more influential than us. Okay, we can go out easily but we should be considerate in the way we behave; eventually we are women ... Women can also solve the problems that men solve. Women can also go to places where men go, but not everywhere. (Safiye (40), Nusaybin)

Now, being free does not mean that one should get rid of individual and family responsibilities. Some of our people do not understand freedom properly. Some of them understand freedom as smoking in front of their father and some understand it as not cooking for their husbands, etc. (Ceylan (39), Nusaybin)

The participation of Kurdish women in politics in Nusaybin depends on two factors. First of all, having family ties with the Kurdish movement (i.e. being a *değer ailesi* member and continuing the struggle of their beloved ones) facilitates women to engage in politics within the movement even though not every member of *değer aileleri* has the chance. Mothers sit on top of the hierarchy, which exists among women members of *değer aileleri*, and it is usually their duty to follow their children’s case while family responsibilities are delegated to daughters and daughters-in-law. The second factor that plays a prominent role in political participation of –especially the young– women in Nusaybin is the extent to which they choose to give their own struggle against male-dominant structures of their society and politics. In

order to fight against such obstacles women develop discussed strategies and sometimes, even use the Kurdish political movement's existing ideological discourse to do so. Nevertheless, the fact that some women find the chance to become 'a Party woman' and engage in politics does not necessarily transform gender roles in Nusaybin *en masse*. For the politically active women though, the new space they acquire empowers them by demonstrating that they have the ability to take part in jobs that are generally associated with men and going out of their home gives provides these women a sense of self-confidence.

5.2. Kurdish women before and after the Kurdish movement

During my fieldwork, I realized that most of the women's political narrative is divided into two – before and after the Kurdish movement. Generally, the period before the Kurdish movement is characterized as awful for women and the period after as a time of freedoms for women. In this section I am going to discuss women's own narratives about how they perceive the differences and changes in their lives brought by the Kurdish political movement.

There is a change for woman in our society. I didn't use to go out of my neighborhood, but now I can tell you that I can go out very easily, I can go to a café and sit there. I don't mean the coffeehouse (*kahvehane*) for men, but we didn't used to do that. Everyone can tell you this, it's not only me. ...Our guerillas, our leader and our party made this change. (Leyla (41), Nusaybin)

Our people became civilized thanks to the movement. For example, my family gave me away when I was 10, but now my daughter is 17 and I can't tell her anything about her marriage. (Müjde (37), Nusaybin)

Berivan's words also support Leyla and Müjde, but for Berivan the change is not as drastic and the residues of the past are still visible:

My family's attitude towards women changed after they met the PKK movement. But they still do not change completely; they still show some feudal characteristics. (Berivan (27), Nusaybin)

It is noteworthy that whereas some of my respondents addressed the Kurdish movement and its organizations as the bringer of such changes, majority of them point only to Öcalan as the subject of these transformations:

We women could not step outside the door. If we had some male guests we could not service for them. We used to give what we had prepared to our husbands and then they would have served the guests. We were not allowed to mix with the society. We only looked after our children in the house, cooking meal, cooking the bread, and doing chores. There was no life for us. This was true for all women everywhere, but when our leader (Abdullah Öcalan) came, he opened up the space for women. All women's eyes opened and new windows were opened for them. (Emine (58), Nusaybin)

According to the old mentality, women should stay at home. They should not work for the Party. Women should not go out alone. In some places this still continues. If it weren't for our leader, that mentality would still have existed. (Gülşah (45), Nusaybin)

Havva also agrees with Emine and Gülşah that women had almost been prisoned before the Kurdish movement. However according to her, men cannot do politics without women, given women's success at it:

When a stranger man came to our house, our family did not let us meet him. They did not let us to open our eyes. I am very happy that women are engaged in politics. I think women are more successful than men in politics ... since women are more courageous than men. ... And this happened thanks to Apo. (Havva (50), Nusaybin)

Ayşe notes that the Kurdish movement valued women and dealt with women's problems such as bride price, polygamy, and education. She claims that it is for this reason that women showed interest in the Kurdish movement:

Women used to be sold by men for the bride price; men gambled on their daughters. When Apocu movement emerged, it first struggled against these kinds of problems. In other words, it became a movement, which paid attention to social problems. This got everybody's attention, but especially women's as the movement very much cared about them. (Ayşe (50), Istanbul)

As outlined in previous chapters, the development of the Kurdish political movement's policy on women, which has been implemented in all political parties, organization, and institutions, related to the movement in one way or another has a multifaceted history of its own. In this regard, although it is significant that a majority of women point to Öcalan as the subject who

transformed women's societal position, it is nevertheless misleading to try to explain such a phenomenon through this single factor. This can be, however, attributed to Öcalan's strong position as a leader in the Kurdish movement.

On the one hand, a majority of women emphasizes the drastic changes that occurred in women's societal role in the aftermath of the Kurdish political movement's mobilization in the region. On the other hand, women often allude to a tension between women and men in local politics. Women repeatedly state that even the Party's men create problems for women when it comes to doing politics together. It can be inferred that men do not necessarily comply with related policies of the Kurdish movement. The following part will address the relationship between men and women in local politics from women's perspective.

5.3. Gender relations in Nusaybin politics

In women's narratives, the problems do not end when women go out of their homes and get involved in local politics. Even after women succeed in their struggle with their husbands, fathers, and/or brothers to become politically active, they have to start to fight the same fight, this time against some of their male colleagues. Women state that even though the Party men accept the Party's line of politics and rules, its programs and statutes, they nevertheless still have reservations about its policy about women. According to women, men underestimate their work, make fun of them and do not ask their opinion when it comes to giving important decisions. My informants stated that it was their fight with the family members that was more challenging and that they therefore do not shy away from contesting the Party men. Another alleviating factor for women in this regard is the fact that they are aware that the party policy is on women's side. Most of the women I have interviewed attributed the unrest of the Party men to their unwillingness to have strong women standing against them in the Party. One of my respondents explained this in the following way:

The only thing I learned from politics is that the dominant male mind cannot accept a woman ahead of him. Men cannot grasp this. There are some men in the movement, perhaps for more than 20 years, yet their minds are still very male dominant. ... I know that those men want passive women, not strong ones. (Sakine (34), Nusaybin)

For Emine, men not only do not want strong women against them, but they also do not want to share their party position and power with women:

Men do not want women to be successful. All the men want this. In their mind, if women become successful they would lose their jobs, their positions; there would be no one under their service. Men are always dictators and they never want to give this up. (Emine (58), Nusaybin)

Gülşah recounts how women are not taken seriously; how men make fun of women when they are working together:

For example, when we have some work with men, they tell us, “Long live you women! How could we manage all these work without you.” You know, they make fun of us; they ignore our work. You see, they do not want women to become successful at what they do. ... When we bring up women’s problems, the Party men always mock us: “Have you just established Kurdistan by doing this work?” (Gülşah (45), Nusaybin)

Ayşe corroborates what Gülşah recounts and she adds that men always want women to do passive jobs even when they are working in the same position as those men:

Yes, we (women) became party administrators; we applied women’s perspective in our work, but all this was not easy. Although men define themselves as democrats, they never accept women’s efforts. In other words, even inside the party men’s mentality is dominant. For example, they always want women to get the passive workload of the party done and when women get ahead, this disturbs men. They (men) say, “These women stepped out of the line.” (Ayşe Gökkan (50), Istanbul)

Berivan indicates that there is a public relations department in the party and this department is responsible for solving the social problems people bring to the party. Both men and women work in this department. She notes that when women-related issues (such as bride price, abduction of girls, domestic violence or divorces) come up, big arguments are almost impossible to evade. She explains below:

We, as the public relations department of the party, visit families that have private problems. Could you imagine that the men in the public relations department themselves would be feudal? Sometimes we fight with those men in front of the family. ... As women we have some red lines. For example, we never accept the bride price for girls, but then we find out that the Party men were breaking some deals with the families behind our backs. After this, we decided not to recognize those men's decisions. (Berivan (27), Nusaybin)

According to women, there are intergenerational differences among men. The majority of my respondents thought that younger men were very different than older ones when it comes to their attitude towards women as the younger generation grew up with the party discipline and they had internalized the party's rules more than the older men. Hence the collaborative work of women and men in Party's youth branch where they organize activities such as demonstrations, protests, meetings, etc. Time after time, women state that even though older generation is politically much more experienced in the party than the youth, they still hold on to the male-dominant mind and are very obdurate about it:

For me only young men's mind change. Others (men) you see around are the same. We had lots of discussions about this. However, if those men had never exercised the party policy (on women), you cannot expect that they would change like that. (Ceylan (39), Nusaybin)

Take out the young men and all men are just the same. I realize that young men are different than old ones. Our young men's minds are very clean and open, but I do not see any change for the other men. (Gülşah (45), Nusaybin)

Both Ceylan and Gülşah believe that there is no sign of a mental change in older generation's attitudes towards women; otherwise they themselves would have brought their wives and daughters to the party let alone not letting them come. Ceylan thinks "the Party men do not want their female relatives to come to the Party as they fear losing power over them and they are afraid of their wives and daughters becoming like us." According to Arife, "men get involved in the Kurdish political movement in order to develop themselves and get a good reputation. Yet for those men women cannot do anything, cannot work anywhere. For them, women cannot be equal to men and that's why women are left behind."

These narratives do not reveal only the tension between the Party men and women, but also hint at a discrepancy between local and national politics. As stated in the earlier chapter, pro-Kurdish political parties are determined to sustain equal political participation for women. In the Party program and documents, one notes significant developments such as women quotas or a co-chair system.

5.4. The Relationship between women and the state in Nusaybin

As indicated before, some women see no difference between the state and men when it comes to power relations. In other words, for them, the state has power over Kurdish people and oppresses them and men have power over women and this power turns to oppression. Arife, a 48 years-old informant, describes the situation as following: “We, as women, are under two oppressions: First, as Kurds we are under the state’s oppression and as women, we are under the family’s and men’s oppression.” The perspective of women on the latter was covered in the previous sections; in this section, the relationship between women and the state and its institutions will be portrayed. For example, how do women see and use state institutions like police and courts? My observations in Nusaybin and my informants’ accounts made it clear to me that these women do not trust neither the state nor its institutions. This is clearly visible in the way they deal with issues such as domestic violence, divorces, and financial aids; they usually refer to the Party and the municipality. For example, when a woman, who is related to the Party, is exposed to violence, she does not go to state institutions, but goes to the Party in order to report what had happened with her family and/or husband. Appealing to the Party or the municipality for problems that need to be addressed is not something specific to women. In fact it is quite common to see disputes and problems such as blood feud, land conflict, abduction of girls, divorces etc. being referred to these platforms.

Although the majority of the inhabitants accept the Party as an intermediary, it is important to note that some of the families do not. For Müjde, those families are mostly distancing themselves from the Kurdish political movement. When Müjde's husband left her and their two children and then got married with another woman, she went to the Party and asked for their help. She demanded that her husband finance her and her children and give them the house they lived in. People from the Party came and convinced Müjde's husband and his family, but they did not keep their promises afterwards. According to Müjde the reason behind this is the following:

I called the party twice or more and they came to my house to speak with him (her husband) ... And he accepted what they told him, but after they left, he told me "Who is the party?" and continued to beat me and my children. Since they are a very bad family, they do not recognize the party. ... I swear, he and his family have never faced the state, never attended a single protest, demonstration or *Newroz*. So, they do not care about the Party. (Müjde (37), Nusaybin)

The narratives of women reflect a change in women's perception of the state. Women often recounted that one of their concerns used to be encountering the state – especially the police and the soldiers of the state. However, now women claim that they are no longer afraid of the state and its armed forces:

When we participated in political activities, our families always used to be very anxious about the women, because if we, women, got arrested by the state it was a big shame for all the family. I know one woman who got arrested in 1991 and something happened to her under custody. Her husband took their children and went to another city and he didn't allow that woman to see her children. But now these things have changed; we are not afraid of the state. For example, yesterday we were collecting signatures for Öcalan's freedom and I went and asked a policeman if he would sign. He did not sign, but you see, we are not afraid of them anymore; they are afraid of the women. (Sakine (34), Nusaybin)

Even though women are no longer afraid of the state, they nevertheless perceive it as their 'enemy'. This is especially emphasized when women refer to the security forces as their specific enemies since the police and soldiers are the most visible representatives of the state in Nusaybin.

I had a photo with our leader (Öcalan) and that photo got into the hands of the *enemy*. They arrested me and I was jailed for 5 months. (Emine (58), Nusaybin)

In the midnight they (police) came and took my son. I suffered greatly, but I did not want to show it in front of the *enemy*. When I fell into the hands of the *enemy* and saw lots of infamy, I do not need my husband anymore. (Müjde (37), Nusaybin)

Since women do not expect to receive a fair treatment for this perceived ‘enemy’, they opt to go to the Party to try to solve their problem there. Women trust that the Party can solve their problems, because first, they are aware of the Party’s gender policy and secondly the Party has influence on men. In other words, men or families who are members or sympathizers of the Kurdish political movement accept the rules and policies of the Party even when it comes to quotidian or private matters. For Berivan, the fact that the Kurdish political movement is very powerful in Nusaybin gives them leverage against men and traditional rules of their society:

Women take their power from the movement. For example we get 90% of the votes here. Before going to the state, women come to the Party, the municipality, and other institutions of the movement. ... They do not go to state institutions, they do not trust the state, and they know that the state would not be an answer for them. You know finally they would be in the court and women know to what degree the court would protect them. (Berivan (27), Nusaybin)

Most interestingly, women do not want to go to state institution directly even for social aid. Usually, their first place to ask for social aid is the municipality and the Party, and then the *mukhtar*. In some cases the municipality directly helps women, especially those whose husband is either in jail, or sick or deceased. However, what the municipality and the *mukhtar* usually do is to fill the forms for women to apply to *Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Vakfı* (The Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation). As the *mukhtar* of Fırat neighborhood and some municipality officers have told me, almost 90% of the applicants for social aid are women. This figure is motivated by two reasons: First of all, a lot of men traditionally perceive asking for help and money a shameful act in the first place. Secondly, people believe

that when they go the Party or the municipality, women have a higher chance than men in receiving the social aid they seek.

The relationship between the state and women in Nusaybin cannot be thought apart from the Kurdish political movement's 'self-defense' (*öz savunma*) strategy, which is one aspect of 'the democratic autonomy' (*demokratik özerlik*) project, aiming at achieving less state and more local governance. The self-defense strategy is explained and legitimated by the unreliableness of the Turkish state for people in the Kurdish region and unviability of leaving the security of the region in the hands of the state, and by the consequent need of the people for protecting themselves from the state. Accordingly, Kurdish people are to constitute their own self-defense mechanisms. The self-defense strategy does not only comprise of military activities, but also refers to democratic organization of the society, which includes more civil society, the protection of the Kurdish culture, and more local governance.⁴⁹ Especially, the Kurdish youth is held responsible for security of their region, against both the state and other paramilitary forces like Hezbollah. The Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H, *Yurtsever Devrimci Gençlik Hareketi*) has declared that it is responsible for public security not only in the Kurdish region, but also in metropolitan neighborhoods of high Kurdish population in cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, Adana, and Mersin. In the cities their responsibilities include fighting against drug dealers and prostitution, which they think is deliberately propagated by the state in such neighborhoods so that the Kurdish youth would become politically inactive.⁵⁰ During informal conversations with my respondents and other people I have met in Nusaybin, this came up more than once and women especially stated that

⁴⁹ 'Demokratik Özerklik ve Öz Savunma', Official web page of the PKK: <http://pkkonline.com/tr/index.php?sys=article&artID=613>.

⁵⁰ 'Çözüm Sürecinin Maskelileri: YDG-H', Al Jazeera Turk: <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/cozum-surecinin-maskelileri-ydg-h>; For more information on YDG-H also see: https://twitter.com/ydg_histanbul; <http://tr.sterk.tv/2716-idgh-cat-orgutu-ilan-edildi.html#.VbCq0vmqqko>.

they appreciated YDG-H as this group protected their children from drug use and prostitution whereas the state tries to do the opposite.

5.5. Municipality and Women Relationship in Nusaybin

As stated above, the state and the state institutions are not the first place people apply for solving their problems in Nusaybin. Instead, related with *democratic autonomy* project of the Kurdish movement, in Nusaybin, the municipality and the party has become a place for social or domestic conflicts resolution.

The municipality has become a place which women easily access. Especially, after the period 2009-2014 when a woman became the mayor, it affected and changed the relations between the women and the municipality significantly. Men, as well as women, stated that women started going to the municipality in greater numbers and more easily.

Former mayor of Nusaybin, Ayşe Gökkan, explained that as the DÖKH, Kurdish women's movement, they decided on 14 municipalities which women will run for candidacy in 2009 local elections. These municipalities were located in areas defined by a strong patriarchy and were also where Kurdish political movement was very strong, which allowed the women to win the seats of municipality. The women's movement insisted on nominating a woman candidate in these places especially if there was a strong traditional social structure which could change or challenge the movement. Nusaybin was also one of those places which were chosen by women's movement.

After Ayşe Gökkan was elected as a mayor of Nusaybin in 2009, she started to implement gender policies in accordance with the movement's projections. She stated that the first thing she did in Nusaybin was to sustain equality in their own work place, in municipality. For this reason, municipality started to employ women especially in those units which are traditionally dominated by men, such as construction, town planning etc. She emphasized the change as

“when I started work in municipality there were only 4 women who worked there but when I left we have more than 30 women employees”. Gökkan indicated that she even intervened into the language which their employees using during the formal correspondences: “if someone used gendered or sexist words, I warned them and told them that that usage was wrong and they should correct it”.

The women’s movement determined Nusaybin as the pilot area to implement gender policies (Interview with Dilan: Nusaybin). Therefore, during Ayşe Gökkan’s mayorship gender policy became a central issue of municipality. In 2010, Nusaybin was announced a “woman town” for 10 days, during which many activities and workshops were carried out for women. Municipality also tried to find ways to increase women’s employment, to achieve this goal municipality founded a woman’s cooperative. This cooperative allowed for women to run cafés and parks which belong to municipality collectively. Also there is a center for women under the municipality called *Gülşilav Kadın Dayanışma Merkezi* (Gülşilav Woman Support Center). In this center women take social, psychological and educational support from experts of municipalities. Especially, women who are exposed to domestic violence seek help at this center. Saadet is one of Gülşilav’s employees and she describes Gülşilav as:

There are two aspects of Gülşilav: first we have vocational courses for women to increase the attendance of women to the center and second we have consultancy service for women. We give legal counselling and provide lawyers for women. We tell their legal rights and we also give psychological counselling...Women generally have problems with their families, husbands and brothers, sometimes we go to their house and speak with men too because this is not only women’s problem actually it is men’s problems. (Saadet (28), Nusaybin)

Construction of the town from woman’s perspective was one of the municipality’s leading aims. Gökkan indicated that all cities were constructed according to men’s desire and need not women’s, and that the same goes for Nusaybin. Therefore they wanted to open spaces for women in the city to take women to the streets. To take women out from their homes, the first

thing municipality hired a woman town planner who can apply women's perspective into construction plans. Town planner Dilan explained her works in municipality:

I have worked with women's movement from the day I came here. The most important thing they want from me is to prepare every plan and everything else with women's perspective, to focus on women. For example, how can we build a women's city, we should rebuild the city according to women's needs. How can we remove men from the places where the women are exploited? How many floors should we give permissions for a construction? When we decided on these we went to women we ask them what kind of city they want. (Dilan (27), Nusaybin)

The municipality developed two projects for women. First one was *Tandır Evleri Projesi* (Tandoori Houses Project). Within the framework of this project, municipality constructed a tandoori house in every neighborhood for women. Berivan explained why tandoori house is important for women:

When you buy a bread from bakery you should pay for it however when women cook that bread no one see her hard labor. For example, when women cook bread in old tandoors in the summer they are exposed to heat and sun and in the winter to the cold and wind. Some people said that why Ayşe Başkan spends money on these kind of unimportant things but you know only men said this. (Berivan (27), Nusaybin)

Dilan emphasizes that the aim of the tandoori project was not only to provide a place to women to cook bread for the family. The main goal of the project was:

Actually, the intention of the municipality was not to make women cook bread, their intention was to socialize women, bring women together because all women have tandoori in their garden so they stayed in the garden. Municipality planned to take them out from their garden and improve the relationships between women. (Dilan (27), Nusaybin)

The other project is women's park project: This project was the construction of a park designed exclusively for the use of the women in Gülşilav Woman's Support Center's garden. Inside this park there are also sport facilities that women can exercise easily without any social pressure. Berivan describes Gülşilav Park as:

The specialty of Gülşilav is it is only for women so women can lie on the grass. It is our reality that we (women) cannot lie down outside when there are men around...So you cannot relax in common places or common park because that place

does not belong to you only but Gülşilav only belong to women and we can easily lie on the grass or do our sports. (Berivan (27), Nusaybin)

The female mayor did not only introduce gender policies and practices in Nusaybin but also she had an important impact on the participation of women in local politics. Having a female mayor in a high position like mayorship itself affects the perception of women on politics. Some of my respondents admitted that in the first place they did not believe a woman can handle municipality works. However, after seeing a woman handling such work better than a man, women were encouraged and felt that they can do everything as men do.

The party offered me an administration position. I said if a woman is capable of being a mayor I can be an administrator of the party. (Havva (50), Nusaybin)

We love Ayşe Başkan very much. She worked for us (women) very much; she always tried to do something for women. . She always led our way and we followed her. She value women very much. She gave courage to us, to me as if she was a light in front of me... For her, women can do everything and she also made us believe in this. (Leyla (41), Nusaybin)

Sebahat Alper is the first woman mukhtar in Nusaybin. She said that the first time she was involved in political activity through the encouragement of Ayşe Gökkan. First, she became a spokesperson of her neighborhood and then during the 2014 local election she decided to be a candidate for mukhtarship. In the election, she competed against 8 men and eventually she won the election. She indicated that during her electoral campaign mostly young women supported her and after she was elected as mukhtar her mission was to work hard to deserve the support of her female voters. She also pointed out that mostly women came to her for doing their work in mukhtar.

Mostly women come to me for their paper works. Women mostly come to me because I am a woman. Men do not come to me for a residence declaration (*ikametgah belgesi*), an identity register copy (*nüfus kayıt örneği*) anymore. For all these kinds of work women come here. Women come here and we go together to the government office for social aids. For example, poor women come here and I write a petition for them to get social aids. With that petition women take 100-200 TL for every two months. Men do not want to come here and ask me for this (petition) instead they send women. (Sebahat Alper: Nusaybin)

Ayla stated that after women see a woman can be a mayor, some women started to come to the party to be elected for municipality assembly or some high positions both in the party and municipality. She continued and said that this situation creates competition among women to be elected and this makes women more and more aggressive.

On the one hand, female mayor affected participation of women to local politics; on the other hand, she provided the grounds for women to visit the municipality and demand services instead of men. From the narratives of my respondents, before a female mayor, men went to the municipality for all their demands whereas women went there very rarely and the women who went there were mostly widows or single women. However, after the female mayor women started to municipality more than men because there was a perception that “mayor is a feminist woman and if women go and ask something from her, she would do it”. Saadet indicates that women came to the municipality frequently, since they wanted to tell their problems to the mayor directly. She said that still when women come to municipality they want to speak with the female co-chair instead of the male co-chair:

One I was in the garden of municipality and I saw a group of women that they came to the municipality. I spoke with them and they told me “Our mayor is a woman and we are women so we came to tell our problems to her she will understand better than men”. I asked them whether they came to municipality before Ayşe Başkan or not. Believe me, some of them told me that it was the first time that they saw the municipality building. (Saadet (28), Nusaybin)

Berivan also supported what Saadet said about the increasing number of women who came to the municipality after the female mayor was elected:

After Ayşe Başkan, 100% increased (women’s number) I told you, women started to come to the municipality for asking services that only men used to come to ask such as sewage works and water cut. Women still come and ask municipality to fix their water supply networks, to make their neighborhood’s roads. In other words, women came to a level that they can demand solutions to their daily problems. (Berivan (27), Nusaybin)

During my fieldwork in Nusaybin, I spent two days in the municipality to interview with some women from municipality employees and to observe women’s traffic to municipality. In

those two days, I realized that women came to the municipality for very diverse demands including: financial aid, to complain about domestic violence, to ask jobs for themselves or their children etc. Female and male, co-chairs, mayors were listening women's problems however some women especially who complained about the domestic violence wanted to speak with the female mayor in private.

Lastly, it should be indicated that having a female mayor does not change or affect every woman's life or their political activities. In other words, for some women it does not matter whether they have a female or male mayor because there is no change in their life as Müjde said:

Honestly, for me it does not matter if there is a woman or man as mayor if I have same bad conditions in my house. I did not see any difference, still I am under the same oppression, and there are lots of women like me. I never see that someone interested in our problems. I mean we are oppressed still the same. Believe me, I join all protests, all demonstrations with them (the party) but they never asked me about my situation. (Müjde (37): Nusaybin)

Perhaps, this situation is not only valid for Müjde. She is only one woman among my respondents. The narrative of Müjde takes us to the idea that there is no monolithic women structure even in the local politics of Nusaybin women could be differ according to their age, economic situation and education level. It is also important to note that clientelism could be a factor in the relationship between municipality, the Party and women. In other words, while some women could easily benefit from services and opportunities of the local government and the party, some other women could not reached or benefited.

To conclude this section, it is important to note that the woman's policies which were implemented in Nusaybin is a reflection of the gender policy of the Kurdish movement. However, having a female mayor on the one hand make it easier to implement such policies,

on the other hand, the female mayor became a role model for lots of women to involve in politics.

To summarize, as analyzed above there are many different factors that affected the political mobilization of Kurdish women into the Kurdish political movement such as being members of *değer ailesi*, being widow or having no husbands. Also, after the 2000s, Kurdish movement improved its gender policy as can be seen from the pro-Kurdish political parties' statutes and party programs. This structural improvement created opportunities for women to participate in politics. However, this political opportunity does not mean that women have not been into struggle as well. In many cases, women have to develop strategies to be included in political activity or political parties. To be in the political arena majority of women have to do a double shift, working both at home and in the party. Although women are complaining about this situation they still continue to do double work because for them entering in political arena or perhaps just going out from home is equal to freedom and this is empowering them. They accept to "pay the price" of their political activism by working both at home and in the party.

Although, women have been in politics or enter in public sphere and having gender consciousness to support each other, it does not mean that social roles of women have been changed in Nusaybin. Women have gender consciousness not only because of their support for each other but also they are aware that there is no difference between Kurdish men and the Turkish state with regards to power relations. For this reason, it could be said that Kurdish women would not prefer Kurdish men's oppression instead of the Turkish state's oppression.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis has analyzed the experiences and dynamics of Kurdish women's participation in local politics in the case of Nusaybin. The study is an attempt to understand the dynamics behind women's involvement in local politics. Also, this has revealed the outcomes and gains of women during and after the participation process. The thesis claims that there are many factors that affect Kurdish women's participation not only at the national level but also at the local. These factors can be categorized under two major titles, one of which is gender policies of the Kurdish movement, which contains the movement's ideology, developments in the gender policy of pro-Kurdish political parties and related with these two, Öcalan's woman approach or project; whereas the second one is women's own struggle to be in the political sphere both at the national and local level. Taking all these into consideration I asked the following research questions: How do politics affect the life of politically active Kurdish women? How do they experience the local politics? How does participation of women in local politics determine and shape social relations in Nusaybin? How do gender policies of the Kurdish political movement affect the participation of women in local politics? How much do gender policies of the Kurdish movement have effect on the transformation of the gender roles within the movement itself?

The qualitative research method provided a ground for women informants to reveal their stories of political mobilization, their political narratives, how they perceived their own political participation and their experiences. Relying on these narratives, I conceptualized what these women said under five themes: The first one is how and why women participated in local politics. I am aware that this is a very broad theme and that especially the question "why" perhaps required the involvement of psychological studies. However, within the scope of my data I looked for an answer in the case of Nusaybin. It can be said that in Nusaybin, the majority of women still participate in politics through their family ties. However, even though

some women's families are politically active, they do not allow women to enter politics, following which women's struggles begin. Women apparently want to be in the political sphere mostly because of their ethnic demands, to demand justice for themselves and their people. Nevertheless, in their narratives, they mostly addressed personal reasons such as just going outside the home, doing something that is deemed valuable in the eyes of the society, or in their words "forgetting personal problems by engaging with something more important". Politics provides new areas for women. However, it is not easy for all women to enter these new areas. Therefore, in some cases women have to develop strategies to be in the political sphere. For example, they use the "egalitarian discourse" of the Kurdish political movement that is they try to convince their families for prospective jobs in the Kurdish political movement's organizations, municipalities and the party. Also, there are many unique strategies that women use to convince their families, even their mothers to be involved in political activities. Political participation creates opportunities for women to increase their political visibility and recognition, gain collective gender consciousness, political experiences and to some degree bargaining power in their homes and communities (Mencutek; 2015: 4).

The second theme is the relationship between women and the Kurdish political movement. For women, the Kurdish political movement is a milestone for the transformation of gender roles. Mostly, the informants portray the time before the Kurdish movement as very dark as opposed to the time of freedom for women after the movement began. Therefore, it is not surprising that so many women embraced the Kurdish political movement. The third theme is on gender relations between women and men in Nusaybin. Women do not only face obstacles from their male relatives while participating in politics but also from men who do politics with them. Participants stated that there is a tension between women and men in the local politics since women started to occupy the space that was perceived to belong to men. They also emphasized that although the men in the party accept the party's politics and rules, the

party's program and statute, they still have a problem with accepting the gender policy of the party. However, there is a difference between men according to their generations. The majority of my respondents expressed that young men are very different from old men in their attitudes towards women, because young men grew up with the party discipline and they internalized the party's rules more than older men did.

The fourth theme is about the relationship between women and the state and state institutions in Nusaybin. The respondents indicated that there is no difference between the state and Kurdish men in case of power relations. From my own observations in Nusaybin and my informants' statements, it can be said that women do not trust the state or the state institutions. The majority of women described the state as their "enemy". They mostly addressed the police forces as their specific enemy since police and soldiers are leading representatives of the state in Nusaybin. Especially, when women spoke about domestic violence, divorces and financial aid they addressed the party and the municipality as a place to solve their problems as opposed to state institutions. The final theme is on the municipality and women's relationship in Nusaybin. According to my interviewees, especially after a woman was elected as the mayor in Nusaybin, the relationship between the municipality and women changed. The female mayor started to introduce gender policies in Nusaybin, such as opening a women's support center, employing women in municipality, and opening a park only for women. Having a female mayor also attracted women to go to the municipality for all kinds of problems. Having a female mayor did not only introduce gender policies and practices to Nusaybin, but also it has affected the participation of women in local politics positively.

From all these five themes it can be said that gender policies of the Kurdish movement are not enough for women to participate in local politics. They also have to struggle with their families, and with their men counterparts to do politics in Nusaybin. Although there are more and more women in Nusaybin's politics, it is still hard to say that there is a transformation in

the gender roles. There is a transitional process in Nusaybin about gender roles, and women are very aware about their situation. However, to enter the political arena they still work double shift as they do housework at home and work at the party. Nevertheless, there is a difference among young and old generations with regard to gender roles. Both young women and men are more sensitive about gender roles and are open to changing those gender roles which have been predetermined by the society.

This study is aware that it is difficult to say there is a monolithic Kurdish woman category. In other words, Kurdish women differentiate according to their classes, education levels and socioeconomic statuses. However, rather than focusing on these, this study focused on the common features of women like ethnic identity. Therefore, for further research studying this topic from the class perspective and focusing on the differences among women, such as analyzing why some women participate in politics and others do not could be a suggestion. Also, it is important to find out about how gender policies of the Kurdish movement have affected non-Kurdish women who live in places like Nusaybin where majority of the inhabitants are Kurds. Another topic for prospective study could be on the tension between women and men in local politics. As stated above, after women's mass participation in politics men felt like women occupy their territory and they are not willing to give up or share their privileges in politics with women. However, there is a gender policy of the Kurdish movement which they have to obey and this also creates dissatisfaction against gender policy of the movement.

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