THE STRUGGLE OF THE KURDS IN TURKEY
FROM NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS TO SOCIAL MOVEMENT

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THE STRUGGLE OF THE KURDS IN TURKEY:
FROM NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS TO SOCIAL MOVEMENT

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To my father...
Abstract

This research examines the historical evolution of the Kurdish people's movement for achieving cultural rights and political representation in Turkey. The main focus is on the period between 2000 and 2015. It draws upon nationalism and social movement theories to analyze how these dynamics feed each other directly. While the Kurdish nationalist movement has been the basis for the Kurdish social movement, the social movement has served to perpetuate the national cause.

The Kurds constitute the largest ethnic minority in Turkey. However, their political and cultural identity has not been constitutionally recognized. For the last three decades, the Kurds deemed as their only option the creation of an independent Kurdish state that would break away from Turkey. From 2000 onwards, there has been a gradual shift in their objectives. Kurdish identity claims began to evolve towards a willingness to work within the existing political system, albeit calling for significant change including a re-evaluation of the Turkish constitution and decentralization of power across Turkey.

Based on empirical evidence collected through fieldwork, including in-depth interviews with activists, ordinary citizens, members of civil society organizations and political parties as well as participant observation in legal gatherings and general strikes, this research demonstrates how Kurdish activists – as organized political actors with resources and a collective identity – ascribed to mainstream social movement practices, particularly in the period post-2000. It advances the novel argument that they capitalized on the shifting political opportunities deriving from Turkey's EU candidacy in 1999, the curtailment of military power in 2007, and the inspirational impact of the regional upheavals in 2011.

To further explore these dynamics within Turkish society as a whole, this study reveals the emergence of a total social movement between 2013 and 2015. Formulated by Alain Touraine, a total social movement is a historic project where social actors determine the general orientation of their society, which in this study consisted of the combination of civil society activity, a democracy-advocating movement and the expression of Kurdish identity.
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Introduction

'Independence or recognition as a national entity have both eluded the Kurds.' Almost forty years have passed since Georges Harris, a Near East history scholar at the Middle East Institute, uttered these words. Harris had argued that both the political “inability” of the Kurds to create a State of their own and the unwillingness of the regional and international community to allow such a State to be formed were the causes of the absence of a Kurdish nation-state. Harris’s twofold political diagnosis remains up-to-date and has been interestingly reflected in a speech delivered by İsmail Beşikçi, a prominent Turkish sociologist and critic of Kemalism, at the House of Commons in London. Beşikçi’s speech on the Kurdish national question revealed how historically the Kurds had been prevented from establishing a political status for themselves within nations where they have important populations, whether that be in the form of self-determination, autonomy or independence. Indeed, Beşikçi argued, the international political order of the 1920s followed by the creation of the United Nations after World War II, did not award the Kurds political or national status as a people.

The Public International Law dictionary [Le Dictionnaire de Droit International Public] defines self-determination as a ‘principle of political democratic inspiration designating the vocation of peoples to administer themselves freely. This principle has nevertheless been transformed into positive law: it created numerous provisions of unquestionably legal character, erga omnes.’ To make this claim, it took the international community to actually

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2 İsmail Beşikçi is not an ethnic Kurd but his works on Kurdish history and politics have made him an iconic figure among the Kurdish community, particularly in Turkey. In 1969 Beşikçi completed a doctoral research about the socio-economic structures in Kurdish tribal communities in Eastern Turkey at a time when the Kurds were deemed “non-existent.” He spent 16 years in Turkish prisons for writing and speaking in defense of the rights of the Kurds as a nation.
3 Kemalism as formulated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk consisted of six principal tenets, known as the six arrows: republicanism; (Turkish) nationalism; populism (or Turkish halkçılık, referring to the radical social transformations), etatism, revolutionism and secularism (or Turkish laiklik, which is an adaptation of the French concept of laïcité.)
5 Dictionnaire de droit international public. Edited by Jean Salmon, Universités Francophones. Brussels: Bruylant, 2001. p.829 (My translation from French to English)
materialize its anti-colonial orientations. On 14 December 1960 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People.\(^6\) This resolution legitimized the right to decolonization as an absolute principle binding on all states. For instance, on the grounds of this resolution and despite all the opposition from colonial powers, the majority of today's existing states in Africa and Asia were able to benefit from the right to self-determination.

Beşikçi raised the injustice of the condition of Kurds during decolonization when they were further demoted to the status of what he famously formulated as a sub-colony.\(^7\) Since Kurdistan was not part of “overseas” from the perspective of the Turkish, Iraqi, Syrian or Iranian administrations, the Kurds remained attached to the mainlands of these four countries and were forced to assimilate, in one way or another, into the dominant entities. This made their plight as a people somewhat different from that of former colonies with a proper colonial status in other parts of the world.\(^8\) Beşikçi judged the foundations of such an international political order, and its repercussions on the Middle East, as being anti-Kurd. He furthermore noted that the Kurdish national question could not be reduced to, or is by no means an issue of, minority 'simply because [the Kurds] have lived here since time immemorial, and their numbers have reached 50 million people, if not more.'\(^9\)

What Beşikçi said in the year 2014 is very similar to Harris's initial argument, comprising a twofold approach with regard to the Kurdish issue: the Kurdish national “deficiency” is internally and externally rooted. The discrepancies among the Kurds – linguistic, cultural and political – have led to recurring disunity between different Kurdish entities, who were unable to achieve in the name of Kurds, a national independence. Hence their political weakness in matters such as national unity or national collaboration. On the other hand, the regional status quo as imposed by the international order was by no means favorable to the

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\(^6\) The UNGA Resolution 1514 (XV) of 1960 can be reached at: http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/declaration.shtml

\(^7\) Beşikçi envisions the Kurdish people as an unofficial sub-colony which, not having been recognized internationally, was never able to benefit from decolonization either. Cf. Beşikçi, İsmail. Hayali Kürdistan'ın Dirilişi. [The Reawakening of Imaginary Kurdistan] Cologne: Mezopotamya, 1997. p.51


emergence of a Kurdish nation-state.

“De-sub-colonizing” the status of the Kurds.

From Beşikçi's perspective, nationalism is a necessary principle for the Kurds. It is the most efficient tool to attain self-determination and independence. In practical terms, it is the ultimate political solution for the Kurds, who, 'already belated in setting up their original borders, should proceed to do so, just as they deserve, as a people apart.' According to this view, the Kurdish problem is not a problem of democratization of Turkey or other countries in which the Kurds live nor a problem of the cultural rights they ought to be granted there: fundamentally, the contemporary Kurdish problem is a problem of land. Beşikçi considers it to be secondary for the Kurds to fight for the democratization in Turkey. In his view, the Kurds should learn from history and rather imitate the struggles of national independence of other peoples. His examples in this regard are clear: 'Did Algerians fight with the aim of democratizing France? Did the Vietnamese do so for the democratization of America? No.' After the imprisonment by the Turkish authorities in 1999 of Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (of which the Kurdish acronym is PKK) there was a gradual shift in the Kurdish movement's aspirations in Turkey from creating a separate state to integrating the Kurdish people into a common, democratized system, based on equal rights, within Turkey.

With his discussion on Kurdish nationalism, Beşikçi brings the Kurdish question down to earth, making it a politically international question, which should be recognizable and resolvable for that matter, not only by the states that are concerned but by the whole of the international community. This is why he insists on the significance for the Kurds to claim their rights as a national people, and not as a minority group, because the demands of a minority are likely to be treated restrictively within a domicile state. Beşikçi's statement illustrates the revival of an old, but still very valid, concept through the Kurdish example, which dictates that nations live under their own rule, that they have a land with clearly

12 Idem.
delineated borders, that is assigned to them, that is theirs.\textsuperscript{14}

Despite such ambitious ideas, the realization of Beşikçi's (and other secessionist theorists') stance would perhaps be extremely difficult to apply today, and could extend catastrophic political and human consequences. Indeed, looking back on the Kurds' past as well as present-day experiences, the realization of a strict geographic division in the midst of an already chaotic Middle East, might not see the light of day without the shadow of long wars and future years of conflict between Kurds and Kurds, Turks and Kurds, Arabs and Kurds, and Iranians and Kurds.

Nonetheless, when nationalism is placed as an ideology at the background of a movement as its principal driving force, it seems that it can render wars or conflicts less questionable for the people involved. It creates a strong psychological motor, stimulating emotions of national belonging. In many different contexts, nationalistic speeches, symbols, flags, colors, songs and slogans are mobilized in order to motivate people to join a specific national cause.\textsuperscript{15} Moreover, it also makes it easier for nationalists to justify conflicts, making them seem more convincing to the people who support or participate in a nationalist movement. Nationalism, in this sense, can partly explain why people choose to engage in risky political activities. In an oppressive state setting, these activities could be punished by imprisonment, torture or exile or in some extreme cases, put their own lives in danger for a cause. As reflected in Benedict Anderson's analysis, '[d]ying for one's country, which usually one does not choose, assumes a moral grandeur (…). Dying for the revolution also draws its grandeur from the degree to which it is felt to be something fundamentally pure.\textsuperscript{16}

From a strictly nationalistic viewpoint, the Nation comes first. The loss of human properties and even human life for the sake of national salvation is an honorable and worthwhile sacrifice. This prevailing nationalistic sentiment can be demonstrated in the Kurdish case in Turkey by several ideas expressing the value of human lives lost for the cause of the

\textsuperscript{14} For a historical analysis, see: Kedourie, Elie. Nationalism. London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966.

\textsuperscript{15} For further discussion of this issue, see: Billig, Michael. Banal Nationalism. London: Sage, 1995.

imagined Kurdish nation. In the phrase: 'Our martyrs are immortal,' the individuals having lost their lives are elevated to a level of spiritual significance, and they are blessed, in the minds of their survivors, with eternal life.\textsuperscript{17} It is also said that 'they have sacrificed their lives for Kurdistan and a better future of their nation,' and once again death is viewed positively, and the dead become (national) heroes.\textsuperscript{18}

Nationalism appeals in the case of a politically oppressed people usually convey a common memory of both past and present-day grievances, providing meaning, a sense of direction and the promise of national fulfillment. The discussion of Beşikçi's idealistic framework of secessionist nationalism is relevant to this study for a specific reason: the idea of territorial nationalism remains alive in some of the Kurdish political circles in Turkey.\textsuperscript{19} By territorial nationalism I mean the idea of a nation endowed with a state of its own, within internationally recognized, national borders. Although individuals in these circles (also encountered within the framework of this study) are not an organizational authority, they promote the idea of striving for a country which, in their imagination, lie through clearly delineated frontiers. The social influence they are capable of should not be underestimated as their nationalist perspective will inevitably impact present and future generations of the Kurdish movement,\textsuperscript{20} regardless of the type of compromise – cultural, regional, federal –


\textsuperscript{20}On the transmission of partisanship, see, among others: Zuckerman, Alan S. “Advancing Explanation in
which might (or not) overrule Kurdish nationalism in Turkey in the near future. Historian Michael Ignatieff had observed in a completely different context that Quebecois nationalism did not fade away after inclusion in Canada's democratic federal system.\(^{21}\) Nationalism, as a human aspiration, is transmitted from generation to generation.

Nationalism, as Kedourie once noted, is one of the most successful phenomena which has ever occurred in human thought and practice.\(^{22}\) For the Kurdish movement in Turkey, nationalism has been a force for resistance and therefore cannot be easily effaced from the minds and wishes of people who declare to have faith in it. In the globalized world we live in today, contrary to what one would think, people more and more tend to identify themselves with nationalist symbols, common history and memory.\(^{23}\) In such a setting, nationalism is bound to last for more generations to come. The Kurds in Turkey may seem to be no exception, and their lack of a nation-state could accentuate their aspiration to achieve one.

**Is a territorial split necessary or could Turkey's Kurds achieve self-determination without going through division?**

How will the Kurds ever overcome the discrepancies amongst themselves in the absence of a state? Put differently, 'can nationalism create a nation?'\(^{24}\) These were the questions that occupied Ignatieff in the 1990s during his visits to the border regions across Turkey and Iraq. Observing and sharing the life of Kurdish fighters on either side Ignatieff compared statelessness to 'a state of mind, (...) akin to homelessness.'\(^{25}\) 'This is what a nationalist understands,' he wrote, 'a people can become completely human, completely themselves, only when they have a place of their own.'\(^{26}\) After 35 years of conflict, and this is only if we take into account the recent past of Kurdish activism, the Kurds in Turkey seem to admit to


\(^{22}\) For further discussion, see: Kedourie, *Nationalism*. 1966.


\(^{26}\) Idem.
themselves that their place is actually where they have always been.

Most commonly Kurds are considered to be one of the largest ethnic minorities in the world without a state.\(^{27}\) Current estimates indicate forty million souls scattered among Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria and other parts of the world including the former Soviet Union, Europe and beyond.\(^{28}\) The number of Kurds living in Turkey is estimated at close to twenty million or more of the total population.\(^{29}\) Although they constitute the largest ethnic minority, their political and cultural identity has not been constitutionally recognized. A legacy of Atatürk, the Turkish constitution has categorically denied the existence of the Kurds as a distinct people and nation. Archives in Ankara indicate that at least 29 Kurdish revolts, both armed and otherwise, took place against the successive governments of the Turkish state throughout the republic's history. The most recent one is considered to have been spearheaded by the Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK since 1984.\(^{30}\)

After having long deemed perhaps as their only option the creation of an independent Kurdish state, the Kurds have more recently shifted their objective. By the year 2000, the Kurdish movement's main discourse began to take the form of advocating democracy\(^{31}\) and something we can refer to as internal self-determination within the confines of the Turkish republic rather than outside of it.\(^{32}\) The roots of this shift can be traced back to the capture of the PKK's leader Öcalan.\(^{33}\) Almost immediately, from his solitary confinement, Öcalan


\(^{29}\) For the most recent facts on the Kurds, see: “Who are the Kurds?” *BBC Middle East,* last modified March 14, 2016. Accessed March 31, 2016. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-29702440](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-29702440)


\(^{32}\) I have talked about these shifts in a presentation given during the Early Career Middle Eastern Studies Researcher Workshop organized by the University of Exeter on 31 October 2015. My speech is available on YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9IP4rpECDI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9IP4rpECDI)

\(^{33}\) This period marked an unprecedented turning point for the PKK within Turkey's political arena. Öcalan ordered the military retreat of the Kurdish guerrillas from Turkish territory to their bases in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region of Iraq. While the Turkish government considered this a defeat leading to the gradual disintegration of the PKK, this military withdrawal did not lead to the demise of the PKK as a political force. In fact, the battlefield of the Kurdish struggle simply shifted to Turkey's political arena, with a focus on the issue of legislative representation. In 2007 Kurdish activists ran in parliamentary elections and won 20 seats. This was followed by a victory in municipal elections in March 2009, where
would drop the goal for a separate state,\textsuperscript{34} progressively replacing it with extensive calls to rewrite the Turkish constitution by recognizing Kurdish identity.\textsuperscript{35}

My doctoral findings have revealed that Öcalan's calls to carve out greater political recognition for the Kurds within the Turkish republic found echo in Kurdish activist circles in Turkey spanning the last fifteen years. Furthermore, this trend has particularly marked the political scene from 2011 onward when Kurds' struggle for political recognition gained momentum against the backdrop of regional upheavals. In fact, as the Arab world descended into violence, the Kurds moved further away from their militant tactics and instead used democratic channels to campaign for the constitutional recognition of the Kurdish people in Turkey.\textsuperscript{36} Gradually, previous Kurdish demands for independence have been replaced with goals for decentralization of local governance, education in mother tongue\textsuperscript{37} and the liberty of organizing under politically legitimate terms “Kurd” and “Kurdistan.”\textsuperscript{38}

Ultimately, from 2000 onward, we have been able to observe a Kurdish movement,


\textsuperscript{38} “İşte Kürtlerin talepleri!” [Here are the Kurdish demands] \textit{DIHA Güneydoğu Güncel}, September 28, 2013. Accessed September 29, 2013. \texttt{http://www.guneydoguguncel.com/iste-kurtlerin-talepleri-9583h.htm}

evolving from a primarily nationalist and secessionist movement to being Turkey's social movement, envisaging the resolution of the Kurdish problem together with Turkey's democratization and the overall establishment of the rule of law. While nationalist and secessionist movements pursue a model of integration usually by separation from the society in which they operate, social movements have as their basic aim holding society together as a whole by modifying institutions, rules or behaviors. Between 2000 and 2015 the Kurdish movement opted for the latter approach that could even avoid a nationalist surge of pride on the Turkish side.

What are the challenges?
Despite transformations in the Kurds' objective that have been briefly touched upon, it still seems incredibly difficult to wholly grasp the dilemma in which the Kurds in Turkey find themselves: historically without a state of their own, and contemporarily without a constitutional framework that could potentially guarantee the rights of their future generations as a distinct group. In fact, one also has to refer to the region's changing geopolitics in order to address the Kurdish question in its entirety. Whether in the name of religion, ethnicity or nationalism many conflicts currently affecting the Middle East share one common feature: they are extremely de-unifying in that they essentially aim at separating out various confessional, ethnic and linguistic communities. In many ways, this situation is comparable to the breakup of Yugoslavia, which had resulted in the 1990s in terrible wars and the ensuing formation of eight different states along ethnic lines.

The actual states of the Middle East had mostly been formed out of the debris of the Ottoman empire in the aftermath of the First World War and were designed according to the will of its victorious powers, notably Britain and France. Some of these homogeneously-conceived entities, which had once been multi-confessional, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic, are now falling apart. It is expected at the very least that Syria and perhaps Iraq will be divided into several different parts. This regional situation has paradoxical but direct implications for the Kurds in Turkey. When other states are breaking up (two of which have governed the Kurds throughout the past century i.e., Iraq and Syria) a significant number of

Kurds might seem to believe that the time for Kurdish independence might be now or never.\footnote{This observation is based on the current debates about the independence referendum for Iraqi Kurdistan, which might inspire Turkey's Kurds or other Kurdish groups in the region who seek a general Kurdish affiliation. For further discussion on the possible impacts of the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan: Al, Serhun. “Debating a Kurdish state.” \textit{Carnegie Endowment for International Peace}. August 12, 2014. Accessed March 31, 2016. \url{http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=56374}; The Economist. “Ever closer to independence.” February 21, 2015. Accessed March 31, 2016. \url{http://www.economist.com/news/international/21644167-iraqs-kurds-are-independent-all-name-they-must-play-their-cards-cleverly-if-they}}\footnote{Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, 160-161.} Therefore nationalism, if articulated as a unifying ideology in the Kurdish case, might play a central role as it also often promises more desirable levels of political power and influence for its advocates and increases the prospects of ethnic and nationalist mobilization in a region where ethnicity is such a politically compelling and influential force. As Anderson has once powerfully noted there are nationalist leaderships 'who plan the revolution and imagine nations to mobilize the rest under the pretext of “self-defense.”'\footnote{Cüneyt Özdemir ile 5N1K. “Selahattin Demirtaş 5N1K’da.” [The president of the People's Democracy Party explains their proposal on the resolution of the Kurdish question] March 5, 2015. Accessed March 6, 2015. The video is available on: \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzJQaoKgLv8}}

Within the Turkish context however, the achievement of constitutional recognition of the Kurds has been placed at the core of the political agenda of the contemporary Kurdish movement – mainly through the activities of People's Democratic Party (in Turkish acronym HDP) but also via several non-governmental and special-purpose organizations, as well as human rights associations (whose members and sympathizers I interviewed and observed) operating in the Kurdish regions and across Turkey. It is important to note that they do not require a Kurdish nation to be mentioned in the Turkish constitution. Rather, they ask all references to ethnicity be removed from the constitution for the sake of equal representation and protection of all components of Turkey's population.\footnote{On the referendum: MacDonald, Alex. “Barzani: Iraqi Kurds to hold independence referendum.” \textit{Middle East Eye}. February 3, 2016. Accessed March 31, 2016. \url{http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/barzani-iraqi-kurdistan-will-hold-independence-referendum-soon-2106771596}; Dolamari, Mewan. “Barzani: Kurdistan will hold referendum before October,” edited by Karzan Sulayvany and Ava Homa. \textit{Kurdistan24.net}. n.d. Accessed March 31, 2016. \url{http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/05609d37-3569-4a8f-a39e-98b97e732503/Barzani--Kurdistan-will-hold-referendum-before-October}}

However, this balancing game remains extremely fragile. Not only is there a continuing
feeling of mistrust among activists and ordinary citizens of Kurdish origin toward both the Turkish state and the nationalist fringes of Turkish society,\textsuperscript{44} whenever there is a deadlock in the political debate regarding the Kurdish issue, we observe general recourse to violence on both sides\textsuperscript{45} usually followed by the argument that a civil war will ensue. The civil war argument advanced by both Turkish and Kurdish politicians has fortunately never become true. However, violence did gain ground after the snap elections of November 2015 when the Kurdish guerrillas and militias brought the war in urban areas and the Turkish government responded with vast military strikes and operations.\textsuperscript{46}

This ambivalence leads me to believe that the Kurdish movement incorporates in itself two opposing realities: the Kurds' willingness to secede from Turkey, which can be found in the DNA of Kurdish national liberation movements overlaps with their consent to remain part of it, simply by opposing it from within. Thus, although the Kurdish movement since 2000 no longer publicly alludes to national liberation as a solution for Turkey's Kurds, the fact remains that its nationalistic, secessionist tendencies for independence cannot easily disappear completely.

On these grounds, it appears that the length of the Kurdish conflict will impact the arguments both in favor of separation versus togetherness. Behind the case for separation lies the assumption that the Kurds have always been manipulated by their surrounding states and need one of their own no matter what the challenges are. The arguments in favor of togetherness, however, revolve around notions of democracy and constitutional recognition. Nevertheless, history has shown that when it comes to the resolution of different ethnic and national problems it is not always the most rational choice that prevails.

\textsuperscript{44} Reporters for Evrensel daily asked the people in Diyarbakir about this: “Erdoğan samimi değil, ona hiç güvenmiyoruz.” [Erdoğan is not sincere, we do not trust him] Evrensel. October 24, 2014. http://www.evrensel.net/haber/94594/erdogan-samimi-degil-on-a-hic-guvenmiyoruz


Developing the argument

The leitmotif of my thesis is that the Kurdish movement from the 2000 onward developed from a strictly secessionist and nationalist movement into a total social movement which wanted to stay in a reformed Turkish polity. The conclusion by contrast states that to maintain it as such there must be peaceful conditions, and that the resumption of military action by the Turkish state and/or the PKK might jeopardize that position. This leaves open the question as to whether the Kurdish movement in Turkey has had a permanent transformation into a social movement, or whether it might revert, in certain circumstances, into a break-away nationalist movement as it has since November 2015.

To study these transformations I have based my research on the work of the French sociologist Alain Touraine whose theories have also transformed themselves throughout his career. Touraine went from a general study of social movements (Touraine 1965, 1969) to the development of a total social movement theory (Touraine 1982, 1983) with the example of the Polish Solidarity movement in the early 1980s; while the Kurdish movement went from being a rather nationalist movement with secessionist tendencies to a social movement in the early 2000s, and a total social movement between 2013 and 2015.

According to Touraine, a social movement is one that meets the principles of identity, opposition and totality which respectively means that social actors first identify themselves vis-à-vis an adversary who consciously strive to build their future by modifying some or most aspects of the society in which they live as part of an historical project. With the example of the Polish Solidarity movement, Touraine advanced the theory of a total social movement which also meant a three-dimensional movement (trade-unionist, national and pro-democracy) but was more concrete than a classical social movement. For a total social movement to be qualified as such, Touraine posited that social actors who participate in it must advance not only their national, but also civil-society

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47 This is not to be mistaken for the total social fact of Marcel Mauss, an anthropological concept through which organizational structures of society can be observed through their exchange systems.

character with a strong will to radically change their society through peaceful actions, refusing violence as well as the monopoly of an ideology, organization, group or state, no matter what the challenges and difficulties are. 49

My intention has been to demonstrate the renewed relevance of Touraine's total movement theory to the Kurdish example. The Kurdish movement reached its “total,” culminating point with the 2015 general elections in Turkey during which it has become the spokesperson for all the progressive forces in Turkey. From November 2015, however, an additional difficulty has imposed itself on the total social movement: first came the bombings of Ankara on 10 October in which HDP members and other democrats lost their lives, 50 then the snap elections of 1 November 2015 in which the ruling AK Party regained its constitutional majority, making the HDP loose 21 deputies compared to the previous June elections, and so reducing their parliamentary representation considerably. In addition to this, we witnessed the resumption of armed clashes between the PKK and government forces in Turkey as well as civilians suffering under curfews and violence. The question which faced us after that moment was that whether the events which have occurred since November 2015 in Turkey have called into question the social movement quality of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. These considerations did not invalidate the thesis presented here in view of the originality of the basic idea with regard to Touraine. Through the Kurdish example, as has been the case through the Polish Solidarity example more than 30 years ago, a total social movement can only live under a peaceful climate. This proves that the absence of violence is an essential criterion in the definition of total social movements.

This research will fall mainly within the disciplinary frameworks of nationalism and social movement theories. Many subjects related to the Kurdish question have thus far been analyzed by scholars through the lenses of identity, politics, ethnicity and nationalism (Beşikçi 1990; Bozarslan 1993, 1999; Gurses 2014; Kirişçi and Winrow 1997; McDowall 2004; Van Bruinessen 2006). This research, though situated within the dominant theoretical


literature on nationalism and nationalist-oriented politics, (Anderson 1991; Gellner 1983; Kedourie 1966; Özkırımlı 2005) will also seek to identify the present-day dynamics of the Kurdish movement from a social movement perspective (McAdam 1982; Tilly 2004; Touraine 1973).

To my knowledge, David Romano is the only scholar to have applied mainstream social movement theory (including opportunity structure, resource mobilization, rational choice, and cultural framing) to explain the emergence and growth of the Kurdish movements from the early years of the Turkish republic through to 2004. His analysis takes the ethnic and nationalist character of the Kurdish movement as a given, but by applying social movement theory he distinguishes himself from conventional accounts of Kurdish nationalism. My own approach by contrast has a different point of departure. I argue that the Kurdish movement in Turkey has become a social movement by around the turn of the millennium. Furthermore, my analysis continues up to the period 2013 to 2015 which I consider has the characteristics of a total social movement (Touraine 1982). This is a new departure in relation to the existing literature on this topic.

Historically, from the Kurdish perspective, although the concepts of social justice, self-governance and the democratic principles of collective selfhood have not been fully codified, the aspirations for democracy and political recognition seem to have been preserved by the work of Kurdish political movements and activists throughout the republican era in Turkey (Bozarslan 2008). The relevance of this approach within the more contemporary context is that it appears that the nature of the Kurdish struggle has shifted from a narrowly-defined nationalist agenda toward what can be seen as a renewed movement framed in an anti-status quo discourse in search of democratic freedoms which have long evaded the Kurds within the borders of their domicile state. The novelty of my argument is that the shifts in the Kurdish approach are seen to have come into play on the grounds of a more conducive (or at least less unfavorable) political environment between 2000 and 2015, which has finally permitted the emergence of a total social movement while at the same time the objectives of the nationalist movement ceased to be prioritized even if they did not die away completely.
My analysis of traditional media sources, numerous encounters and participant observation on the ground have confirmed that the majority in Kurdish civil society refuses to eventually secede from Turkey to which they declare they fully belong. For example, when asked whether they would consider the regional turmoil as an opportunity to pursue a general Kurdish affiliation, most of my interviewees respond, as opposed to Beşikçi's assertions, that the Kurds should be aiming at democratizing each of the states in which they reside and that the dynamics of their struggle(s) should be understood within their domestic contexts. Furthermore, the movement of resistance by the Kurds in Syria against the Islamic State or the quasi-independence of Iraqi Kurdistan are seen as honorable and remarkable gains for the Kurds in general, but do not lead them to believe that they should break away from Turkey to join Syrian or Iraqi Kurdish enclaves. If anything, this state of affairs gives them inspiration and strength to transform what is regarded to be an endless conflict in Turkey's Kurdish context into a resolvable political matter by using the institutions, organizations and networks at their disposal without necessarily asking for a boundary change. Behind this, an effort to convince Turkish civil society can also be observed in that the Kurdish movement is not a movement that disconnects from the rest of Turkey, or for that matter, from any other movement demanding more democracy in this country.

Kurdish activists in Turkey therefore insist on a radical amendment to the Turkish constitution whereby not only Kurds but also other minorities living in Turkey are officially recognized as distinct peoples within the territorial integrity of the existing state. Their following demands concern the right to administrative local autonomy, education in mother tongue, preservation of Kurdish culture and liberty of free association. The fact that there

51 Here I refer to the enforcement, both militarily and otherwise, of Kurdish forces in the Northern enclaves of Syrian territory as well as the developments in Iraqi Kurdistan, where both the Kurdish leaders and the international community discuss more than ever the possibility of the creation of an independent Kurdistan (within Iraq). I have asked all my interviewees whether they saw these developments as an opportunity for Kurdish unity across borders.

52 The shifts in the Kurdish movement since 2000 also indicate that the Kurds were able to drop their nationalist conceptions of self-determination, which is strictly connected with a territorial dimension i.e., creation of a Kurdish state, and opt for a non-territorial conception of the right to internal self-determination i.e., decentralization across Turkey. A non-territorial approach is generally considered by scholars as a device for resolution of ethnic or nationalist conflicts which, at its most basic, consists of devolving power to a group expressing a distinct identity claim along non-territorial lines (Coakley 1994).
exists an emphasis on ethnic or cultural values such as the Kurdish language, culture and demands for reattribution of Kurdish names to historic Kurdish places, indicates that the Kurds, despite not having achieved a national state, have all the same attained a general national consciousness based on their distinct ethnicity. This national consciousness tells them that as a distinct people they are not assimilable to the Turkish identity, but that, once again, this does not prevent them from continuing to live under the roof of a Turkish state, as long as their expressions as a distinct entity are tolerated within the broader political context of democracy and human rights.

53 What I mean here is that in the Kurdish example traditional theories of nationalism fall short of explaining how some groups such as the Kurds might skip the stage for statehood before asserting themselves as a national entity.

Methodologies employed

My research project features qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation because they generate in-depth data and address the motivations driving human behavior (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006). It also includes a reading and analysis of local media sources to which I have had access during fieldwork such as the reports, leaflets, pamphlets, and weekly and monthly magazines of several different civil society organizations operating in the region. These organizations include: the Human Rights Association (İHD); Association of Civil Society Development, Solidarity for the Oppressed (MAZLUM-DER); Association of Religious Scholars for Mutual Aid and Solidarity (DİAY-DER); Association for Sustainable Development to Fight Poverty (SARMAŞIK); Diyarbakır Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DTSO); Diyarbakır Branch of the Chamber of Architects (DİMOD); Diyarbakır Branch of the Chamber of Civil Engineers (İMO Diyarbakır); East and Southeast Businesswomen Association (DOĞUNKAD); Diyarbakır Industrialists and Businessmen Association (DİSİAD); Industrialists and Businessmen's Federation of the East and Southeast (DOĞUNSİFED); and the Nûbihar Association. The written and social media sources which enriched this research also consist of Turkish newspapers such as Sabah, Radikal, Milliyet, Hürriyet, Evrensel and Zaman as well as the news, articles, political speeches and declarations that appeared at the Firat News Agency (ANF), the Dicle News Agency (DIHA), Bianet.org, Yuksekovahaber.com and Kurdistan Post, among others.

Methodological considerations prior to fieldwork.

Before starting the fieldwork, I had to reflect on the need for objectivity, bearing in mind my own Kurdish origins in Turkey. A researcher must take the utmost care to abstain from his or her assumptions and prejudices when studying a society to which he or she belongs. As social actors, reality not only touches our intellect but also our sentiments, both conscious and unconscious. Pierre Bourdieu rightly suggests that a (social) scientist must go beyond their judgements and build an objective look through an epistemological break.
Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron 2005). My own experience of epistemological breaks draws more concretely from my Readings on the Field Research Experience (Anderson 2003), which allowed me to think of myself as an 'indigenous outsider.' I originally belong to the community of my informants, yet I remain an outsider because I take a critical view toward my sociological object (Anderson 2003).

Leading Franco-Nigerian anthropologist, J. P. Olivier de Sardan once wrote that a researcher who does not know the local codes of his or her terrain cannot deduce from it a relevantly interpretative analysis either (De Sardan 1996). My Kurdish origins have provided several advantages. Speaking the languages of my respondents, Kurdish and Turkish, and knowing their culture helped me contextualize the expressions of their thoughts and feelings, perhaps more easily than a complete outsider.

Kurzman's insight further helped me through fieldwork. He argues that there are two common errors to avoid in social science research, which could otherwise set limits to our ability of understanding human phenomena (Kurzman 2008). The first has to do with the researchers who are culturally different from the people observed, whose perceptions and actions might appear to them as simply 'non-sensical.' The second is the assumption that what is under scrutiny is so 'evident' that it is not worthy of further analysis (Kurzman 2008). As a researcher with similar cultural affiliation with my sample, my main intention was to overcome the second challenge.

In social science research, there are usually many risks related to interpretation. In order to guarantee maximum relevance in the analysis, traditional sociological approaches always prove useful. One of these is the idea developed by Max Weber, according to which social actors attach a meaning to their actions and act in accordance with their understanding of the social world around them (Weber 1971). Sociologists must understand and interpret these subjective processes as well as meanings that social actors attribute to their actions (Aron 1967). Throughout my research, I tried to apply such a comprehensive approach in order to better understand the ways in which social actors construct a collective identity to organize and mobilize in the way they do.
Fieldwork.

I carried out a first stage of fieldwork throughout July 2013 in Istanbul, Turkey. I conducted semi-structured and recorded in-depth interviews with two Turkish journalists and authors; a Peace and Democracy Party (in Turkish acronym BDP) deputy of Turkish origin and a Kurdish activist from the same Party; a Turkish activist from the Turkish Labor Party (in Turkish acronym EMEP); and the director of the French Institute of Anatolian Studies in Istanbul.

In addition to my formal interviews, I also conducted semi-informal, non-recorded conversations with a dozen other individuals, who define themselves as democrat Turks, and state they wholeheartedly support the 2013 peace process with the Kurds. Four amongst them said they voted for the Republican People's Party (in Turkish acronym CHP) and the rest for the ruling Justice and Development Party, which is known as the AK Party by its Turkish name. My interviews and conversations in Istanbul were particularly stimulating as I was able to collect contrasting insights into how the Kurdish movement and the Kurds are perceived and understood by my interlocutors of non-Kurdish origin with different journalistic, academic, political and social backgrounds.

I carried out a final stage of fieldwork from early December 2013 to early January 2014 in Diyarbakır, Turkey. My choice of Diyarbakır was not arbitrary. On a demographic level, the city is one of the biggest in Southeastern Turkey to be heavily populated by the Kurds. Besides, Diyarbakır has been home to thousands of displaced Kurds who, caught in the crossfire especially during the 1990s, were forced to flee their rural homes when the armed conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK reached its peak.Over the years, Diyarbakır became one of the most important centers, where Kurdish protesters stage all kinds of collective demonstrations against the Turkish state. Symbolically, Diyarbakır is often considered to be the unofficial historic capital of an

imagined (Turkish) Kurdistan. Indeed, to make that imagination real thousands of young Kurdish men and women from Diyarbakır and its surroundings have joined the ranks of the PKK throughout the last thirty years of conflict.

In other respects, there exists today an incredibly broad spectrum of civil society organizations and special-purpose associations in Diyarbakır. Their agendas deal with poverty, gender inequality, religion, preservation of culture, environment protection, local governance, state repression, health, education, (including in mother tongue), migration and post-migration, psychological and physical conditions of political activists in jail, political freedoms and intra-Kurdish politics. Looking at this range of issues, which are at the core of many of the public mobilizations across the entire region, Diyarbakır was a perfect avenue to observe the scars and effects of the Kurdish conflict, and make sense of the conditions in which Kurdish activists mobilize.

In Diyarbakır I lived in several different host households. People were going through a very harsh winter with no electricity in some places and no proper means of heating in many others. The snow remained on the paths for weeks within the city walls and beyond. Serious social and economic problems had come to surface. In the city of Diyarbakır alone five thousand households had been diagnosed as unable to afford a daily meal. I came across dozens of women and children who lined up at the door of the Sarmaşık Food Bank to get basic food assistance.\(^{56}\)

I spoke to local merchants who complained about the lack of municipal services as they were trying to warm themselves in front of their stores with coal fires in small pots like nomadic people. They were critical of their elected representatives whom they considered to be 'busy doing politics' while ignoring the need for socio-economic development in the regions they represented. A Kurdish businessman whom I met on this project would later confirm this irony: 'Actually, the situation is very tough for us. Everything is ultra-politicized. I seriously wonder how on earth we'll ever be able to produce something other than...'

\(^{56}\) Sarmaşık Food Bank operates under the Sarmaşık Association for Sustainable Development to Fight Poverty, which is a non-governmental civil society organization established in 2006 in Diyarbakır. The Association tries to create awareness for social solidarity among citizens. With its limited means Sarmaşık is far from resolving the problem for good and all. For more information: [www.sarmasik.org](http://www.sarmasik.org).
than politics.\textsuperscript{57}

During my field trip local elections were approaching. Diyarbakır was wallpapered with election posters of different political parties and ornamented with party flags. The use of written Kurdish was noticeable within the public sphere, namely for election purposes or the promotion of the city's various cultural activities. A native of Diyarbakır, running his own business in the city center, said that Kurdish activists should get credit for promoting the use of written Kurdish: 'Although not everyone speaks it, the effort to use written Kurdish despite bans is remarkable. We [as Kurds] have come a long way thanks to these efforts.'\textsuperscript{58}

In addition to the election atmosphere one could also see the effects of the civil war in Syria, which is a major concern of Turkey's Kurds. Politically, the Syrian-Kurdish issue has always been important for Turkey's Kurds. However, at this time, Syrian Kurdish refugees, mostly children and the elderly, had crossed the border to find shelter within the city of Diyarbakır as well as in many of the neighboring villages and towns. All in all, there was at least one thing that no observer's eye could ever miss: solidarity. Solidarity prevented many of the disadvantaged from perishing from hunger or cold, or in the case of Syrian-Kurdish refugees, simply made survival possible.

\textit{Interviews and participant observation.}

In Diyarbakır, I conducted 45 semi-structured, in-depth interviews, each of which lasted at least an hour, if not longer. These interviews were recorded. My interviewees included activists involved in civil disobedience campaigns and general strikes organized by a political party, a human rights association, a non-governmental organization or the Diyarbakır metropolitan municipality, town councils and other regional structures. I interviewed a total of 29 individuals from these organizations, selected by their ability to speak about the aims and objectives of the Kurdish movement, especially when their activities for human rights, social change and justice were taken into account. Other

\textsuperscript{57} Personal recorded interview with a Kurdish businessman in the automotive industry, conducted at his workplace in Diyarbakır, Turkey on 4 January 2014.

\textsuperscript{58} Informal conversation with a Kurdish employer in the education sector, conducted at his workplace, in Diyarbakır, Turkey on 10 December 2013.
participants were identified by virtue of their role and position in a relevant organization. More precisely, my interviewees were either active in a position of representative, member, employee or volunteer in one of the following organizations: 
the Human Rights Association (İHD); 
Association of Civil Society Development, Solidarity for the Oppressed (MAZLUM-DER); 
Association of Religious Scholars for Mutual Aid and Solidarity (DİAY-DER); 
Association for Sustainable Development to Fight Poverty (SARMAŞIK); 
Diyarbakır Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DTSO); 
Diyarbakır Branch of the Chamber of Architects (DİMOD); 
Diyarbakır Branch of the Chamber of Civil Engineers (İMO); 
East and Southeast Businesswomen Association (DOĞUNKAD); 
Diyarbakır Industrialists and Businessmen Association (DİSİAD); 
Industrialists and Businessmen's Federation of the East and Southeast (ĐOĞUNSİFED); 
Diyarbakır Children and Youth Center; 
Society of Free Journalists; 
The Armenian Surp Giragos Foundation; and the Nûbihar Association. In addition to these, I conducted formal in-depth interviews with a BDP deputy, the founder of the British Time Language Schools in Diyarbakır as well as an academic with relevant expertise from the School of Law and Political Science at Dicle University.

My interviewees from political parties were also either active in a position of representative, member or volunteer. Altogether I conducted 16 interviews with individuals from a political party. More precisely, they operated within the BDP both in Diyarbakır and the city of Mardin (9 persons); the AK Party's Diyarbakır branch (2 persons); the Rights and Freedoms Party, (in Turkish acronym HAK-PAR) (2 persons); the Association of

60 The Nûbihar Association is composed of the followers of Said-i Nursî (1877-1960), a Kurdish Sunni theologian. Today, they hold that the Kurds have never fully benefited from the concepts of equality and fraternity in their homelands and that they deserve the same rights as those enjoyed by the Arabs, Persians, and Turks. This information is based on my personal recorded interview with an influential member of the Nûbihar Association, conducted at his workplace in Diyarbakır, Turkey on 25 December 2013.
61 HAK-PAR was established in Turkey in 2002. It states to espouse Kurdish nationalism with central
Democratic and Revolutionary Culture, (in Turkish acronym DDKD\textsuperscript{62}) (2 persons); and the Democratic Society Congress, (in Turkish acronym DTK) (1 person). In addition to my formal interviews, I conducted several informal interviews with the mayor of Diyarbakıır; two project managers from the metropolitan municipality; two artisans working at the historic Hasan Pasha Han; a taxi-driver, two doctors, a farmer, two senior persons randomly met at a mall in central Diyarbakıır, and a Kurdish nurse and poet.

In general, I used the method of snowball sampling (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006) which helped me find my interviewees and reach them without any trouble. My main concern was to make sure that I reached out to as many individuals and from as diverse backgrounds as possible, in order to offer findings that would be as representative and objective as possible. From the list of the persons consulted and interviewed, I am confident that this concern has been for the most part allayed.

My interviews variously took place in the premises of political parties, civil society organizations, special-purpose associations, Diyarbakıır municipality, Dicle University and also in my interviewees' homes. I had prepared a semi-official interview guide prior to fieldwork but in order to increase the reliability of my survey, I tried not to give out unconscious signals that would guide my interviewees according to what I expected to hear from them but rather probed areas suggested by their responses.

Interviews were conducted in the preferred language of participants: Kurdish or Turkish. I transcribed these once the interview work was over and took account of my participants' words in the process of data analysis, referred as grounded theory methods in social sciences (Neuman W. L. 2011; Beaud and Weber 2003). The main subjects we discussed included the impacts of regional developments on the Kurds and the Kurdish movement, personal stories of activism, and expectations from the then ongoing peace talks. I was also

\textsuperscript{62}DDKD is one of several Kurdish leftist parties, which was established in 1975 in Turkey. Like several other Kurdish leftist organizations, it too emerged from within the Turkish left, but over time saw itself pushed to the sideline of Kurdish politics, especially with the growth of the PKK.

leftism. It remains a rather marginal group within the regional Kurdish political spectrum. Nonetheless, this does not make them less ambitious, and despite its lack of resources, HAK-PAR remains an active political party. This observation is based on my informal talks in the premises of the HAK-PAR in Diyarbakıır and my interviews with one of its active members and vice-president, on 25 December 2013.

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\textsuperscript{62}DDKD is one of several Kurdish leftist parties, which was established in 1975 in Turkey. Like several other Kurdish leftist organizations, it too emerged from within the Turkish left, but over time saw itself pushed to the sideline of Kurdish politics, especially with the growth of the PKK.
interested to know whether my interviewees identified with the claims and demands of the Kurdish movement, what their major social and economic concerns were, and the ways in which they resolved these issues.

In addition to my interviews, I also conducted a focus group on December 6, 2013 in the presence of 10 religious scholars and retired and current priests of mostly Kurdish origin in the premises of the DİAY-DER in Diyarbakır. We talked about their perceptions of the regional status quo, the peace process, Öcalan's proposals for the Kurdish move toward Turkey's democratization, and their activities such as Civil Fridays, and how they maintained both their faith-based and political agendas.

In terms of participant observation, my activities took place from December 6, 2013 to January 2, 2014. On 6 December 2013 I attended the official monthly meeting of the DİAY-DER in the presence of 19 of its regional representatives, joining from nearby cities and districts; and on 2 January 2014, one of MAZLUM-DER's regular meetings where 14 activists, women and men combined, discussed their agenda ahead, including actions to be undertaken in favor of the victims of domestic, tribal and state violence in the Kurdish regions.

During fieldwork, I attended a panel at the Cegerxwin Cultural Center (in the Kayapınar district of Diyarbakır) entitled, 'Freedom of the Press in Turkey since the 1950s' with the participation of four renowned journalists of Turkish origin coming from Istanbul and Ankara as well as the chairperson of the Society of Free Journalists. On 14 December 2013 I attended another panel at Bağlar Municipality, Diyarbakır on 'Language, Assimilation and Trauma' with an audience of 50-60 people, mostly women and youth, and the participation as speakers of a law professor from Dicle University, a Kurdish linguist and academic from Mardin Artuklu University, a psychologist and a Kurdish writer. On 22 December 2013 I attended a final panel at the Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı Cultural Center, entitled, 'Diyarbakır Identity during the Peace Negotiations' with main themes such as the role of Diyarbakır during the republican era, migration and identity traumas, and the historic importance of regional peace. At least 200 people were present to attend this event, said to be sponsored
I was able to conduct direct observations without disclosing my status as a researcher. For example, I took this opportunity to talk to the people, mostly women who applied for food aid on a regular monthly basis at the Sarmaşık Food Bank. I also observed while BDP activists gathered in central Diyarbakır to commemorate the Roboski massacre and protest against the State's “atrocities” in the region. The Roboski massacre is the name given to a military operation held by the Turkish military in December 2011 when 34 Kurdish civilian smugglers were killed. On another occasion, I observed BDP activists gathered in front of the BDP headquarters and leaving for Mardin by several buses to 'March for the lifting of borders' between Syrian- and Turkish-Kurdish regions.\footnote{My main participant observations took place throughout December 2013.}
Thesis plan

Following this introduction, my thesis consists of five main chapters. In the first chapter I review the respective literatures on nationalism and social movements. Although nationalist and social movements share similarities in terms of organization and mobilization, there is a lack of literature bridging these two themes (Tiryakian 1995). In an effort to bridge these two dynamics I then explore the ethnic mobilization of the Kosovo Serbs between 1985 and 1989 as outlined by Nebojša Vladisavljević. This is followed by a discussion of Charles Tilly and his colleagues' program of contentious politics as a way to bridge the gap between social movements and nationalism and the wars, revolutions, ethnic mobilization, and democratization they entail.

Next I propose my own contribution to these debates. I argue that nationalist movements are likely to mutate into social movements when their initially-claimed objectives have only been partially realized. The contemporary Basque, Northern Irish, and Kurdish examples are provided to substantiate this argument. All three of these movements began as primarily nationalist and then transformed into social movements, namely after having achieved important political gains. More specifically, my research demonstrates how the Kurdish movement in Turkey was able to evolve toward a social movement, something which Kurdish activists could not have worked out without a history of national resistance. When nationalist struggles achieve their initially-stated goals, this usually brings independence to the group on behalf of whom independence was claimed. However, the Kurdish movement developed from a nationalist movement into one which wanted to stay in a reformed Turkish polity.

In the second chapter I examine the historical foundations of the Kurdish movement in Turkey, which is a critical prerequisite for contextualizing the more recent aspirations and political activities of Kurdish activists in that country. The chapter is entitled 'the emergence of Kurdish nationalism,' which does not lead to the creation of a separate state but contributes, throughout the early years of the Turkish republic, to the formation of a collective national awareness among the Kurdish community in Turkey.
The chapter explores Kurdish nationalist activity through the main Kurdish revolts that were carried out against several centralist and assimilationist governments of the newly-founded Turkish state between 1925 and 1938. In the literature, these revolts are qualified as primarily reactionary, ethnic, nationalist or Islamic (Jwaideh 2006; Kutschera 1997; McDowall 2004; Romano 2006; Olson 1989). These qualifications are not wrong, but the revolts can also be considered as a basis for what I propose to call in the following chapter the *proto-social movement phase* of Kurdish activism.

Generally, early Kurdish struggles are viewed by many contemporary Kurdish activists in Turkey (including my interviewees) as both a source of great suffering but equally as a source of inspiration when battling against state repression. They seem to be critical of the considerable influence tribal structures and religion exerted on the evolution of these early Kurdish revolts, which damaged Kurdish unity and are keen not to see these “grave” errors repeated in the context of their present struggle.

*In the third chapter* I firstly examine the dynamics of the Kurdish movement in Turkey from the 1960s through to 2000, nearly three decades of political inactivity after the last traditional Kurdish revolt. The chapter is entitled 'the Kurdish movement's *proto-social movement phase,*' during which Kurdish activists raise issues of social justice and economic equality by mobilizing under the umbrella term, the *Eastern meetings.* My argument is that the Kurdish mobilization in the 1960s does not turn into a fully-fledged social movement because the activists remain excluded from institutional channels and their resources are limited. Hence the appellation “proto-social movement” would be more appropriate.

Secondly, I focus on the period from the late 1970s onward when, as a counter-reaction to the Turkish state's perceived policies of discrimination, Kurdish secessionist tendencies heighten. With the emergence of the PKK in 1978, the Kurdish movement becomes a decidedly nationalist movement. The latter expresses its objective to wage a battle against the Turkish state in order to break away from it, but also seeks to target the traditional structures of Kurdish society to remodel them in socialist terms. From the late 1970s until 2000 the Kurdish movement can be seen to have functioned as a nationalist and secessionist
movement with strong ethnic overtones, taking inspiration from other nationalist liberation struggles across the world.

Related to these developments, I finally draw attention to the emergence in the 1990s of civil society organizations, political parties, special-purpose associations, informal networks and solidarity mechanisms among the Kurdish community in Turkey. From a social movement perspective, I argue that these will operate as the Kurdish movement's 'social movement bases' (Tilly 2008) particularly post-2000. Charles Tilly makes a distinction between social movements and social movement bases. Social movements cannot operate without social movement bases which include formal and informal networks and active and potential participants who have shared experiences of activism and a collective identity. 64

In the fourth chapter I argue that the contemporary Kurdish movement in Turkey, particularly from 2000 to 2013 functions as a mature social movement. In other words, because the politics of this movement have challenged and, at times, evaded traditional definitions of nationalism and nationalist-oriented politics during this timescale, it has been possible and prescient to analyze the Kurdish movement through not only the prism of theories of nationalism but also, and more importantly, those of social movements. This has been done insufficiently when both the literature on Kurdish studies and social movements are taken into account (Eccarius-Kelly 2014; Güvenç 2011; Romano 2006; Westrheim 2005).

The dynamics of social movements cannot be separated from the political, economic and historical contexts within which they develop (Tilly 1978). The inseparability of social movements and their contextual background is brought into focus with the case of the Kurdish movement in this chapter where I propose that we examine the dynamics of the Kurdish movement using the analytical tools provided by the social movement theoretical literature: the political process, resources and their mobilization, articulations of collective identity. 65 According to Tilly social movements emerge depending on their political

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65 The scholarly conventional designations for these are 'political process, resource mobilization and
contexts and the capacity of actors to capitalize on the opportunities deriving from flexible political environments. Anthony Oberschall emphasizes that social actors with available resources are advantageous when engaging in a social movement. In fact, these resources provide networks that might first seem to simply be a crutch for agitators for social change, but they may become instrumental in and of themselves, in that they can bring together organizations and individuals that have been previously unknown to one another as well. Alberto Melucci underlines that social movements rely on the expressions of an identity that is collectively forged and maintained with the help of collective action.

Accordingly, the dynamics of Kurdish movement meet these angles of approach of what defines an operational social movement in the Kurdish case from 2000 through to 2013. The lessening of Turkish state repression compared to levels of repression pre-2000 (Gurses 2014), shifting civil-military alignments in the country as well as the regional upheavals commencing with the initial waves of the Arab spring have all contributed to produce a more beneficial political environment for the Kurdish movement to mobilize as a social movement of Turkey.

In other words, Kurdish activists have been able to capitalize on the new political opportunities to address their demands through mainly electoral, democratic, non-violent and mediatized means. They have been able to engage in diverse forms of civil disobedience (e.g., Civil Fridays), petition campaigns, mass meetings to commemorate
“the disappeared” at the hands of previous successive Turkish governments, press releases and hunger strikes. Human rights activists, civil society organizations, and many more have been observed to attend these public demonstrations. Based on participant observation, it can be noted that the issues raised concerned the preservation of distinct local cultures and traditions; the future of Kurdish media and press; the improvement of regional economic structures; freedom of speech and organization; and the fight against state repression in all its forms. It is important to add here that not only politically-engaged activists, but also many sect leaders, journalists, elected representatives, businessmen, women, youth and artisans could be observed to participate in these movements.

From this perspective, the Kurdish movement appears to have fitted Tilly's social movement framework of a 'distinctive, connected, recognized, and widely available form of public politics,'\textsuperscript{70} rightly placed outside of temporary or ephemeral collective demonstrations. The Kurdish movement's nationalist background and resource accumulation (i.e., the general national awareness developed since the early Kurdish revolts along with the PKK's struggle afterwards, and especially the social movement bases in the 1990s) played a central role in terms of offering available resources among the Kurdish community to pursue the resolution of the Kurdish question as part of Turkey's democratization.

\textit{In the fifth chapter} I apply a total social movement theory into my case study by focusing on the most recent phase of the contemporary Kurdish movement between 2013 and 2015. Formulated by Alain Touraine, a total social movement is a three-dimensional – national, social and democratic – project\textsuperscript{71} where social actors determine the general orientation of their society and do not fall into the trap of violence despite the challenges they may face.\textsuperscript{72} First, I explain the theory of total social movement through the example of the Polish


\textsuperscript{72} Touraine, \textit{Solidarity}, 91.
Solidarity movement in 1980, upon which Touraine had originally developed his theory. Next, I explore some of the important advancements and events of the Kurdish movement in the period between 2013 and 2015, demonstrating civil society activist, democracy-advocating and national aspects of the Kurdish movement, according to which we can qualify it as a total social movement.

During this time frame, the 2013 peace process is formalized between the Kurds and the Turkish state. In the 2014 presidential elections, the head of the pro-Kurdish HDP is able to present himself as a candidate, addressing wider audiences other than Kurds, which then secures him a considerable share of general votes across Turkey. In the June 2015 legislative elections, the HDP, spearheaded mainly by Kurdish activists but considerably supported by many Turkish intellectuals and democrats, is able to pass the world's most undemocratic threshold of 10 percent, reaching out to all of Turkey with a promise of correcting injustices, fighting, in their words, the AK Party's hegemony, and finalizing the project of Türkiyelileşme, literally Turkeyfication.

A political project based on an inclusive definition of national identity, accepting to be part of Turkey while belonging to an ethnic group other than Turkish, Türkiyelileşme is the most striking aspect of the total social movement in my case study. It espouses an inclusively national, socio-political, and democracy-advocating agenda, thus fulfilling Touraine's criteria in its particular context, which favors all the disadvantaged groups and provinces.

73 Several translations are possible for the project of Türkiyelileşme. The one I propose is a literal one: Turkeyfication. This is completely different from Turkification, which is widely considered to be the assimilation of individuals and non-Turkish groups into Turkish culture or state. Turkeyfication means the integration of people with diversity of origins into Turkey proper, and not necessarily into Turkish culture or language. For more references, see: Jwaideh, Wadie. The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006.; Erbil, Pervin. “Nüfus ve İskan Politikaları,” [Population and Settlement Policy] In Resmi Tarih Tartışmaları 3: İttihatçılıktan Kemalizme, [From Unionism to Kemalism] edited by Fikret Başkaya and Sait Çetinoğlu: 277-296. Ankara: Maki, 2007.

and not just the Kurds and the Kurdish regions that have been in one way or another marginalized. Also, it does not opt for violence as its main mode of protest. "Türkiyelileşme" furthermore demonstrates Kurdish activists' willingness to work within the established system of the Turkish state with a goal to change its institutional fabric with constitutional, infrastructural and provincial amendments while supporting its territorial framework as it is.

"Türkiyelileşme" found deep-rooted support among the Kurdish grassroots, and to some extent, the Turkish public, particularly in the context of Turkey's 2014 presidential elections and the June 2015 general elections, when Kurdish activists considered their struggle as being the motor force for Turkey's democratization. The fifth chapter finally discusses the limits of the Kurdish case as a total social movement.
CHAPTER ONE

The relationship between nationalism and social movements

Introduction
In order to examine the nationalist past and the contemporary social dynamics of the Kurdish movement, it is necessary to explore the intersection between nationalism and social movements. In the Kurdish case, these dual aspects can be seen to have dovetailed and fed each other directly. While the nationalist movement has been the basis for the social movement, the social movement serves to perpetuate and strengthen the Kurdish national cause.

To better understand these two related concepts, the respective theoretical literatures on nationalism and social movements will be reviewed. Although they share similarities in terms of organization and mobilization techniques, there is a lack of literature bridging these two dynamics. Work however undertaken by Nebojša Vladisavljević on the ethnic mobilization of the Kosovo Serbs between 1985 and 1989 has gone some way to fill this gap. It has done so by analyzing *inter alia* what was originally presumed to be an ethnic movement in terms of political opportunities arising from the decentralized structure of the Yugoslav state.\(^{75}\) Other work contributing to cover this *lacuna* can be found in studies undertaken on the issue of what has come to be referred to as contentious politics. Charles Tilly and his colleagues have argued that all dynamic social movements including war and revolutions can be viewed in terms of a common underlying concept, which they have characterized as contention.\(^{76}\) This concept certainly has its strengths but if applied too widely can sometimes fail to capture the particular characteristics of a specific social or nationalist movement.

In light of these considerations, the link between nationalist and social movements will be refined. I will argue that nationalist movements are likely to mutate into social movements


when their initially-claimed objectives have been only partially realized. The contemporary Basque, Northern Irish, and Kurdish examples will be given to substantiate this argument. All three of these movements began as primarily nationalist and then transformed into social movements after having achieved important political gains in national terms. The lesson I draw from these developments is that their separation into discrete categories is inadequate if they are to be better understood. Defining the Kurdish movement in Turkey as primarily within the framework of either an ethnic or nationalist movement (Besikçi 1997; Bozarslan 2009; Gunter 2008; Kahraman 2001; McDowall 2004; Romano 2006) overlooks the fact that it has become a fully-fledged social movement encompassing all aspects of Turkish politics, and not just the Kurds.
Nationalism is a very complex phenomenon to deal with. 'Nation, nationality, nationalism – all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse,' stated Benedict Anderson. Eric Hobsbawm, in his introduction to the seminal *Nations and Nationalism*, wrote that if one day an 'intergalactic historian' were to come down to earth following a nuclear war in search of what had destroyed humanity, he would realize the key word to be “nation” which would remain a mystery. Nevertheless, these authors, along with others, have come up with several well-founded definitions.

One of the most outstanding analyses of nationalism was developed by Anderson when he posited that a nation 'is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.' Decomposing Anderson's logic, a nation 'is imagined as a community, regardless of its flaws, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as deep, horizontal comradeship.' Anderson's notion of community accords crucial importance to nationalism's cultural roots, which, as limited as they may be, are often the source of sacrifice to the extent that they can even trigger people to kill and to die in their name. Anderson suggested that we understand nationalism, 'by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being.'

The nation is an entity conceived in the human mind. One belongs to a particular community, and without being able to know all of its members, one connects with them in imagination. However, a nation is not religiously missionary, and is limited to itself by the

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79 Idem.
83 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 12.
existence of other nations. Its limits are susceptible to fluctuation and membership may be experienced in subtle ways. For example, the Iraqi Kurdish Jew singer from Jerusalem had filled the hearts of migrant Alevi Kurds living in London with so much joy and excitement that nationalism to an overarching Kurdish nation could be seen in the sparkling eyes and emotional discourses of the participants throughout the night.

The origins of nationalism as a political principle.

Drawing on two-hundred years of philosophical thought, revolutions, industrialization, state formation, religion, tribal attachments as well as subjective feelings of belonging and awareness, scholars of nationalism have greatly enriched our understanding of diverse nation-building processes. Hans Kohn notes that although nationalism had its origins in earlier centuries, the French Revolution was one of the most powerful factors in its intensification and spread (…). Thereafter, nationalism grew as an idealized form of centralized politics over a sovereign nation and a distinct territory. The environment that proved conducive to such development was marked by the growing position of the third estate in eighteenth century French, British and US politics, formulated by Kohn as '(…) the process of integration of the masses of the people into a common political form.'

This brought with it the idea of breaking with the past i.e., the dismantling of traditional economic forms, the dissolving of conventional relations between the people and the nobility, and the development of new sciences and secularization. Anderson agrees on this

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85 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 7.
86 I was present in the concert of Kurdish Jewish music given by Ilana Eliya on June 30, 2012 at the Bernie Grant Arts Centre in Tottenham. The event was organized by the London-based Gulan charity organization, gathering an audience of Sunni, Alevi and Jewish Kurds from both Iraq and Turkey. Coverage: www.gulan.org.uk
87 Kohn notes that the origins of nationalism can be traced back to the Roman Empire where themes such as common ethnicity and state membership were already present. He stresses however that, although nationalism as a centralized form of government existed during the reign of absolute monarchs prior to the French revolution, it was the modern-state that 'filled the central organization with a new spirit and gave it a power of cohesion unknown before.' Cf. Kohn, Hans. The Idea of Nationalism. A Study in Its Origins and Background. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956. p.4. Also see, among others: Calhoun, Craig. Nations Matter: Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream. London and New York: Routledge, 2007. p.41.
89 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 3.
91 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 3-5.
Timing and context of the emergence of nationalism. He insists on the sovereign character of nationalism following the gradual abolishment of divinely orders and dynastic hierarchies, namely through the philosophy of Enlightenment and the French revolution. But he gives utmost importance to the role played by the ensuing development of capitalism and the evolution of print technology in the construction of the notion of community through the articulation of vernacular language, especially in newspapers.

Despite the unifying power of nationalism, it also created new divisions between nations. Kohn powerfully posits that nationalism

'(…) integrated into past patterns, separating and forming the nations more than ever into distinct corporate personalities, not only politically, but down to the very substance of their life, in their innermost dreams and in the ideas which propelled them to action. Thus the gulf between nations grew in the age of nationalism.'

As for Elie Kedourie, he criticizes nationalism for its inability to advance society in places where it inherited the position of old empires. Particularly in Europe and later in the Middle East, nationalism gave grim power to certain groups over others, dismissing the ethnic, religious or linguistic diversities of these geographic areas. Viewed from this perspective, nationalism presented paradoxes, unfair rule, normative biases and double standards. According to Kedourie, nationalism is an accidental phenomenon and thinkers of the Enlightenment and other influential European theorists could have come up with a more tolerant political principle, less pathological, so to speak. In later years, Craig Calhoun, referring to the breakup of Yugoslavia, can be said to agree with Kedourie when he asserted that '(…) the notion of self-determination is basic to democracy and yet both neglected by

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92 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 7.
95 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, 573.
96 Kedourie, Nationalism, 138-139.
97 Kedourie, Nationalism, 139.
98 For an anti-thesis, see: Said, Edward. Culture and Imperialism. New York: Vintage, 1994. Said criticizes the 'ahistorical' element in Kedourie and Gellner because the latter see nationalism as an exclusively Western phenomenon whereas Said believes all nations borrow from each other and that is perfectly normal: 'Culture is never just a matter of ownership (…) but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures.' Source for quotation: Idem, p.216-217
democratic theory and shrouded in illusions of primordiality.99

Ernest Gellner is not as harsh as Kedourie in analyzing the evolving patterns of nationalism within the historical context of modernization. As opposed to Kedourie, Gellner believes that nationalism has somewhat unavoidably come to be as the outcome of the transition from agrarian to industrial society. This had great impact in the transformation of cultures through national education systems, linguistic standardization, communications and state formation. In fact, Gellner defends that nationalism generated nations rather than the opposite. However, Gellner and Kedourie converge on the idea that nationalism uses cultural heritage selectively to meet the requirements of a political program.100 Therefore, it is a political principle or ideology.101 Both authors draw attention to the belligerent character of the nationalist principle in that nations who are not endowed with a state of their own are forced to live within a dominant majority with whom they might not identify, and who might be unwilling to accept this subordination.102 This is how most nationalist movements with claims for separate nationhood have come into existence, for example.

As Calhoun states, 'claiming state-centered political rights on the basis of nationhood is arguably one of the defining phenomena of modernity.'103 In fact, in order to be counted among actual nations, a territorial political unit further imposes itself. Hobsbawm explains that 'the equation nation = state= people, and especially sovereign people, undoubtedly linked nation to territory.'104 In the early twentieth century, the implication of dividing nations into smaller territorial entities brought with it, in the words of Hobsbawm, 'mass expulsion or extermination of minorities.'105 This mainly refers to the '(…) Armenian genocide in 1915, the expulsion of the Greeks from Anatolia, the return of the Germans living in South Italy to Germany and the extermination of the Jews.'106

99 Calhoun, Nations Matter, 84.
101 Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, 1.
102 Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, 2.
103 Calhoun, Nations Matter, 56.
105 Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1870, 133.
106 Idem.
Nationalism as a contagious phenomenon.

In 1952, Halford Hoskins saw nationalism 'as a kind of virus.' In fact, he continued, 'its existence in one state tends to induce it, even as a defensive mechanism, in others. (...) As colonialism passed out of style, it is only natural that the peoples of former Middle East mandates should have been affected by some of the forces that have been so characteristic of the nations of the West.

In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Ottoman empire, mainly based on ideological variations of pan-Turkism or pan-Arabism, many authentic cultures and ethnicities were undermined or discriminated against on the basis of their distinct character vis à vis the dominant cultures. In its adopted versions, nationalism led to the creation of arbitrary nation-states in the Middle East. For example, in 1921, the region witnessed the creation, under British administration, 'of a Kingdom of Iraq ruled by Sunni Panarab nationalists, the population of which was, in its great majority, either not Sunni or not Arab.

In the aftermath of the First World War, we entered an era in the Middle East in which, on one hand, President Wilson's proposal for nations' self-determination and on the other, the advancement of the Bolshevik model in resolving national and minority issues within the Balkans and elsewhere, monopolized the entire political et diplomatic arena. Turkish nationalism, for example, consolidated itself with the foundation of a new Turkish state in 1923. Kurdish nationalism developed in reaction to surrounding nationalisms, namely Turkish nationalism in Turkey and Arab nationalism in Iraq and Syria. This occurred before an industrialization process had begun for the Kurds, which demonstrates the fact that industrialization is not a necessary condition for nationalism to emerge as a political project as suggested by Gellner. The repercussions of large-scale wars and the development of neighboring nationalisms can also be sufficient in provoking such a process.

With regard to self-determination for heterogeneous groups within an established nation-
state, where Ernest Renan’s principle of association by free will is lacking (to be discussed shortly), Kedourie argues that they are taken to pose a threat to national unity, and for that reason are usually thought to be either rejected or assimilated into the surrounding dominant culture. Kedourie's analysis corresponds to the situation in which the Kurds found themselves in the Turkish nation-state, where they perceived the effervescent Turkish nationalism as hostile toward their culture, language and historical existence and were considered a (potential) threat to the Turkish state's national unity and territorial integrity. Forced to blend in with the Turks, the Kurds opted for periodic insurrections throughout the past century for the sake of preserving their distinctive collective identity, destabilizing the very unity of the Turkish state.

One can almost argue that the Ottoman millet arrangement, minus the corruption and brutality, would have made more sense for the Middle East than remodeling it along strict national lines. In the former Ottoman arrangement, various ethnic, religious and linguistic communities could express themselves relatively more freely, because it was primarily based on religion and not on ethnicity. Alevi, Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Druze, Kurds, Turks and many others were part of the same millet, and there was no ethnic barrier between them. Turkish history, dating back to the pre-Islamic era, had been cast aside. To say the least, old Turkic-Asian traditions had been dissolved within Islam, rendering ethnic criteria void for the overall Ottoman state and society.

For Albert Hourani, two reasons made it inevitable to replace Islamic consciousness and solidarity with 'the idea of the unity and authority of the nation' in the Middle East. Preceding the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, nationalism had already made its way from

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112 Kedourie, Nationalism, 127.
113 I would like to note that this idea was brought up by Professor Noam Chomsky when he kindly accepted to exchange with me on the Arab spring and its impact on the Kurdish community at his MIT office in Boston on April 9, 2012.
114 In the literature, Kedourie furthermore states that the Ottoman millet system fell apart as the religious, linguistic or ethnic groups became infused with the nationalist doctrine and that their limited autonomy within the empire did not appease their nationalist aspirations thereafter. Cf. Kedourie, Nationalism, 117.
the West to the Middle East through elites and the educated class. Furthermore, people in the Middle East, coping with pressure originating from Western presence on their soil, estimated that only national loyalty and unity could save them. These assumptions were based on the idea that Western nations owed their power to strong national unity.\textsuperscript{118}

**Categorizing nationalism.**

Theories on nationalism have long been debating over the importance of the objective versus the subjective factors which define nationalism. Objective markers include 'ethnicity, language, religion, territory, common history, common descent or ancestry (kinship) or, more generally, common culture,'\textsuperscript{119} while subjective markers refer to the aspects which create a shared sense of membership to a certain collectivity. Solidarity, loyalty, collective identity and ethnic awareness are typically seen as expressions of subjective nationalism.\textsuperscript{120}

Given the merits of both points of view, it immediately seems more accurate to consider objectivity and subjectivity as interdependent variables. In such a case, one can argue that it is difficult to conceive a particular group of people uniting as a nation without an objective sense of commonality.\textsuperscript{121} When Gellner suggests that nationalism weds a nation to a state of its own, he also works through his assessment dually. He pursues that whatever seems naturally linked to a nation, such as its language, customs and traditions, is subject to modification over time, but the historical continuity of nations can never be totally dismissed.

Ernest Renan, the pioneer \textit{par excellence} of the concept of nationalism believes that the creation of a nation transcends the natural, religious, linguistic and racial frontiers as long

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\textsuperscript{118} Hourani, “The Decline of the West in the Middle East-I.” 36.
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\textsuperscript{120} Özkırımlı, \textit{Contemporary Debates on Nationalism,} 17-18.
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\textsuperscript{121} Their combination in the Kurdish example would imply that objectively, the Kurds constitute a distinct group by virtue of their language, culture, history and land; and that they have subjectively, on various occasions throughout their history, been able to mobilize feelings of shared belonging in view of achieving a political unit of their own. Political unit is a term employed by Ernest Gellner, referring to nations that are able to determine their own affairs.
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as its adherents feel unified in soul and thought.\textsuperscript{122} He discredits the significance of nationalism's objective components, which are not as decisive in the making of nations as spiritual and subjective unity.\textsuperscript{123} Renan's theoretical framework qualifies to be the basis for civic nationalism whereby individuals are considered as citizens with equal rights regardless of their historical or ethnic background and are bestowed with a state which is also neutral toward the citizens it governs. According to this view, a nation-state is the embodiment of civic nationalism based on the aggregation of individual wills.\textsuperscript{124}

As for ethnic nationalism, it is usually associated with the emergence of German idealism.\textsuperscript{125} Theorized by late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century philosophers such as Herder and Fichte, nationalism builds upon the idea that humanity is naturally divided into separate nations whose members identify themselves through a common language, race or religion under the clearly delimited borders of a sovereign state.\textsuperscript{126} Such a nationalist doctrine dictates that '(…) language, race, culture and sometimes even religion, constitute different aspects of the same primordial entity, the nation.'\textsuperscript{127} By contrast with the French example, Kohn postulates that this 'cultural nationalism'\textsuperscript{128} has its source in the weakness of the third estate in countries such as Germany and Italy at the beginning of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{129}

All in all, ethnic and civic nationalisms converge on the idea of a sovereign state which is deemed inextricably linked with the existence of a modern nation. In my view, what they diverge on is the way in which the psychological and the natural frontiers of a thusly conceived nation is delineated. For the proponents of ethnic nationalism, human beings are

\textsuperscript{123} Renan. \textit{What is a Nation?} 277-310.
\textsuperscript{125} Bourdieu, \textit{Sur l'Etat}, 544-549.
\textsuperscript{126} Bourdieu posits: 'The German model is very interesting because it is a romantic model: first there is the language, the nation (Herder), then there is the state, and the state expresses the nation. That is not what the French revolutionaries do: theirs is the universal State, and it is this State that makes the nation, via school, army etc.' (My translation from French) Bourdieu, \textit{Sur l'Etat}, 547; Kedourie, \textit{Nationalism}, 71-73.
\textsuperscript{127} Kedourie, \textit{Nationalism}, 73.
\textsuperscript{128} Kohn, \textit{The Idea of Nationalism}, 4.
\textsuperscript{129} Idem.
born into a culture, and this is something which cannot be acquired afterward, and therefore determines one's national belonging. Whereas the proponents of civic nationalism put forward the political homogeneity of individuals and their national belonging to a state as citizens.

Yet, Umut Özkırımlı reframes that both approaches as well as their combination are far from being fully convincing. On one hand, history has shown that '(...) ethnic and national groups are not simply the product of preexisting cultural differences, but are the consequences of organizational work undertaken by their members.'130 On the other, the fact that members of a group feel belonging towards the same community as their fellows does not suffice to call them a nation.131 By dealing with these dilemmas, and the types of nationalism, namely ethnic and civic, which derive from them, Özkırımlı puts forward what he considers to be a better working theory: nationalism should be approached as a particular form of discourse.132 In the hope that such an understanding should reconcile highly diverse standpoints, nationalism is, in Özkırımlı's view, '(...) a particular way of seeing and interpreting the world, a frame of reference that helps us make sense of and structure the reality that surrounds us.'133 (italic by the author)

Özkırımlı's effort to overcome the dichotomy between ethnic and civic nationalisms bears similarity to Calhoun's proposition that 'nationalism is a discursive formation that gives shape to the modern world. It is a way of talking, writing, and thinking about the basic units of culture, politics, and belonging that helps to constitute nations as real and powerful dimensions of social life.'134 Özkırımlı narrows his analysis down to four main types of discourses to render the context in which nationalism operates less vague. Firstly, he argues that the discourse in which nationalism is shaped creates categorical divisions such as “us” and “them.”135 Secondly, the discourse contains a hegemonic tendency. Here, the author refers to nationalists who most commonly engage in discourses that aim to establish control over the populations they address. The hegemonic dimension also demonstrates that

130 Özkırımlı, Contemporary Debates on Nationalism, 17.
131 Özkırımlı, Contemporary Debates on Nationalism, 19.
132 Özkırımlı, Contemporary Debates on Nationalism, 15, 29.
133 Özkırımlı, Contemporary Debates on Nationalism, 30.
134 Calhoun, Nations Matter, 27.
135 Özkırımlı, Contemporary Debates on Nationalism, 32.
nationalist struggles are about power. Thirdly, the discourse renders nationalism as a given, and the national is considered natural and devoid of the aspects of social construction.\(^{136}\) Fourthly, he suggests that the nationalist discourse implies that nationalism is something to be internalized, namely through family socialization and school education.\(^{137}\)

In any case, the discursive elements as advanced by Calhoun and Özkırımlı can be read as an endeavor to find common points among different nationalisms rather than to focus on their divisions as a way to make sense of its preeminence in contemporary politics. Given the claims of ethnic and nationalist movements for political autonomy or self-determination which marked the past century throughout the world (e.g., Eastern Europe, Canada, the Middle East, East Asia,) Calhoun rightly posits that nationalism has been one of the most effective forms of mobilization in modern discourse.\(^{138}\) However, the drawback to this discursive formulation is that it does not clear the existing dichotomy between ethnic or civic nationalism. Objective or subjective approaches continue to occupy scholarly agendas, and most importantly, everyday lives. Human groups seem to be attached to their group specificities under the influence of linguistic, ethnic or other commonalities as well as the political scheme under or against which they operate in a nationalist way. In fact, nationalism exists both in discourse and in practice.

One of the greatest challenges lies in the normative biases that stem from rather dubious distinctions between the concepts of civic and ethnic in nationalism studies. In this regard, Özkırımlı points out that civic nationalism has usually been associated with the West, where individuals are believed to be considered to be equal citizens before the law regardless of their ethnic background, and states are regarded as democratic because of their civic character.\(^{139}\) Whereas ethnic nationalism is associated with the “‘Rest’”\(^{140}\) of the world (albeit with some exaggeration by the author), and can be seen in countries where individual rights and cultural diversity are seen as incompatible with the non-civic political

\(^{136}\) Özkırımlı, *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism*, 33.
\(^{137}\) Idem.
\(^{138}\) Calhoun, *Nations Matter*, 53; Also, Wright pointed out many years ago that, 'National sovereignty, defined by the new international law, became the prevailing value, the dominant sentiment, the political objective, and the leading cause of war in the modern period.' *Wright, A Study of War*, 52.
\(^{140}\) Idem.
systems in place.

The difficulty is that these clear-cut divisions not only conceal the nuances and flaws of both civic and ethnic nationalisms where they are practiced, but also continue to produce normative biases. An example from my case study would be that most of the Kurdish activists or ordinary citizens observed and interviewed within this study, when asked, fiercely refused to define their movement as an ethnic or a nationalist one, not because they did not, in fact, consider their movement as such, but because of their persuasion that ethnic nationalism is primitive and backward.
A review of the social movement theory

Traditionally, until the 1960s, academic debates on collective action and social movements had mainly been theorized under the assumption that social mobilization was the promiscuous occurrence of individuals reacting irrationally to circumstances outside their control. However, following the emergence of the civil rights and antiwar movements in the United States in the 1960s, the ways in which scholars started to approach and analyze the views and motives of people in action altered. As social actors took to the streets denouncing injustices they faced, it became hard for scholars to consider them as being simply misled, erroneous or confused. Scholars then began rejecting dominant accounts of mass psychology, crowd behavior and structural determinism while prioritizing alternative variables and giving social actors credit for their actions.

After the 1960s, social movements differed thematically, revolving around free expression and the right to representation of diverse cultural and political identities. For instance, African Americans and other disfavored groups in the United States pursued equality and abolishment of racial segregation. Most feminist and gay movements around the world protested against unequal gender structures in society. Superseding class boundaries, France's student protests of 1968 provided disadvantaged groups with influence over policy-making.

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141 It was proposed in the literature that in the nineteenth century Europe the reaction of workers for better living conditions and a healthy working environment was equal to that of “irrational” or even “unthinking” crowds who would – in vain – go against institutions or entire states that are far more powerful than themselves. For more historical examples, see: Goodwin, Jeff, and Jasper, James M. The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts. Eds. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. p.5; Eyerman, Ron, and Jamison Andrew. Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. p.11-19


146 According to Edelman, by the 1970s two main theoretical tendencies were identified out of these examples. In Europe scholars were talking about identity-oriented movement paradigms whereas in the
In early 1982, the American sociologist Doug McAdam would conclude that,  

'all social movements pose a threat to existing institutional arrangements in society. (...) What marks social movements as inherently threatening is their implicit challenge to the established structure of polity membership and their willingness to bypass institutionalized political channels. Emerging, as they do, (...) social movements embody an implicit demand for more influence in political decision-making.'

Social movements opened a path for new theories to emerge, such as the concepts of historicity, political opportunity structure, and resource mobilization, with which scholars could henceforth identify the meaning that social actors attribute to their own actions. Additionally, the existing literature on rationality, cost-benefit calculations and framing were considered for the first time for the purpose of analyzing social movements. Thereafter, scholars' explanations drew increasingly upon empirics while the following questions guided their research: how and why do social movements come about? What are their different dynamics? What pushes people to join social movements or draw back from them? How are movements affected by their interaction with the state?

Understanding social movements is essential to understanding social change, for through these diverse processes, individuals are mobilized or regrouped in order to modify institutions, rules or behaviors in a given environment. They usually start as a challenge against the state and embody ordinary peoples' claims on authorities with the aim of changing certain aspects of the society in which they live. Social movements aim to persevere until they obtain the rights solicited on behalf of movement participants as well as the non-participants they claim to represent. Although they have varying life spans, scholars emphasize their durable character, enough to distinguish them in terms of both

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148 Framing is a conceptual framework developed by the American sociologist and political theorist William Gamson in 1992. Framing is built upon injustice, identity and agency. Injustice frame highlights the indignation of individuals in any given society. Identity frame is constructed when individuals distinguish themselves from those whom they hold accountable for the injustices they endure. Agency frame holds that individuals believe they have the power and capacity to do something about their problems. For further discussion of this issue, see: Gamson, William A. *Talking Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

149 For further discussion, see: Touraine, Alain. *Sociologie de l'action*. Paris: Seuil, 1965.

analysis and public policy, from ephemeral, temporary or purely effervescent protests or riots. In this regard, Tilly rightly argues that all popular action cannot count for a social movement. The latter is a 'particular, connected, evolving, historical set of political interactions and practices.'

**The concept of historicity in social movements.**

According to Alain Touraine, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, society went from being *industrial* to becoming *post-industrial*. He emphasized the importance of this transformation by explaining that in industrial societies, most aspects of social, political and cultural organization were determined by the accumulation of capital. In post-industrial society, however, the fight for control over mechanisms of production began englobing politics, technical tools, knowledge, belief systems, and more broadly, culture. In that regard, the following passage is particularly instructive:

'Industrial societies were able to transform “means of production” to invent mechanical devices and systems of organization, but our society invents technologies to produce symbolic goods, languages, information. It produces not only means but ends of productions, demands and representations. (…) The result is that the field of social movements extends itself to all aspects of social and cultural life.'

When applying this logic to social movements across the early, mid and later twentieth century, we see that in industrial society, social movements most typically take the form of workers' movements, whereas in post-industrial societies they cover a broader spectrum including the May 1968 protests, the revolutionary movement of Allende's Chile, and the 1980's Polish Solidarity movement.

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157 For a more detailed argument, see: Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye*, p.78-79.
According to Touraine, a social movement can be qualified as such when the three principles of identity, opposition and totality are present. In its broadest sense, identity in a social movement can be defined as the act of participants identifying themselves through the movement. Touraine further qualifies identity through a Marxist prism, positing that this sense of identity is determined by the social conflict i.e., not in positive terms but rather in opposition to something else. This process seems to involve a certain degree of rationality as social actors are believed to define and assume their role against an oppositional adversary. Thus, the first principle, identity, is intrinsically linked to the second, opposition. In order to effectively organize itself, a social movement must define its opponent.

As mentioned at the outset, whilst traditionally, scholarly literature on social movements had perceived participants as particularly susceptible to manipulation, especially at the hands of their leadership, and lacking the capacity to define their opponents on their own, Touraine, along with his contemporaries, rightly criticizes this theory, positing instead that social movement participants determine the contours of their struggle and know against whom they intend to fight (i.e., opposition principle), particularly during moments of action.

As for the third defining aspect of social movements, Touraine theorizes that social activists are capable of renegotiating any aspect of society or social organization through their struggle. In order to achieve this renegotiation, however, social movement participants embrace the principle of totality, which is the will for radical social transformation and self-

157 This is an idea that covered most of Touraine's research throughout his career. For several different references, see: Touraine, The Voice and the Eye, 81.; Touraine, Production de la société, 361, 370.; Touraine, Sociologie de l'action, 161.
158 Touraine, Production de la société, 361.
160 Touraine, Production de la société, 362.
161 For a brief critique of Touraine's social movements mostly uniting by their oppositional character, see: Buechler, “New Social Movement Theories,” 444.
As a synonym for totality, Touraine speaks of historicity, by which he refers to a prospective vision of society that a given social movement seeks and strives to create. In Touraine's own words, historicity can be understood as 'the capacity to produce an historical experience through cultural patterns, that is, a new definition of nature and man (...)'.

Historicity therefore encompasses social movement participants' capacity to own their respective movements consciously and collectively, providing the reasons for which they engage in collective action and the direction in which they orient themselves. It enables social actors to engage in a series of struggles with the view of changing the foundations of the social, economic and political system to which they are opposed. From this perspective, social movements as conceived by Touraine have extraordinary potential for shaping the future of society, giving voice as they do to the characteristics of the social structure they wish to prevail in the future.

In the context of the twenty-first century, Touraine's theoretical framework loses some of its relevance for, at its core, the thesis is based on class conflict, and a fight over systemic domination: '[i]n any given society, it is the ruling class that controls historicity, or the main cultural patterns (i.e., knowledge, investment, and ethics), which they impose upon the subordinate class, who fight to define their own cultural patterns.' In today's societies, especially given the proliferation of neoliberal socio-economic policies on a global scale, the totality principle seems decreasingly often a criterion fulfilled by social movements. Rather than aiming to radically change the entire system, collective and public claim-makings more typically aim to address certain inequalities within the existing system. Nevertheless, Touraine's theory fills a theoretical gap in the classic social movement theory in that not only does it examine how and why protest occurs but it also explores the ways in which social actors demonstrate a capacity of reflexivity about the foundations of the

165 Delas and Milly, *Histoire des pensées sociologiques*, 197-198
166 Greg Martin draws attention to the class aspect of Touraine's theory, for more, see: Martin. *Understanding Social Movements*, 62.
167 Idem.
society in which they live.\textsuperscript{168} For Touraine, social movements are historic projects where social actors are able to act upon themselves.\textsuperscript{169}

To complete the more abstract theoretical framework of social movements, it is useful to refer to a more concrete, practical analysis of social movements. Charles Tilly posits that a social movement 'consist[s] of organized contention undertaken by a group or collectivity that shares some sort of common goal, and that this contention is engaged in by those who are in some sense excluded from “politics as usual.”'\textsuperscript{170} In order to overcome such exclusion, social movements usually provide their participants with innovative ideas while offering them tools e.g., the actions and methods described in Tilly's protest repertoire including public meetings, special-purpose associations, sit-ins, vigils, petition campaigns, strikes and other collective action.\textsuperscript{171} Social movements call into question the credibility of accepted power relations and the ambitions or ideologies that hinge those relations. Formal and informal ties are created through this process and utilized both inside and outside the scope of the mainstream institutional consensus.

\textit{The political process and resource mobilization models at the birth of social movements.}

Social movements emerge as social actors enter into conflict with those whom they consider as their adversary over the control of politics, the economic sphere or more generally, culture.\textsuperscript{172} The political opportunity structure is a highly useful concept in making sense of the antagonistic environment of the emergence and growth of a social movement.\textsuperscript{173} Social actors must first believe in the existence of certain political opportunities before protesting. Such belief depends directly on the perceived openness or closure of the political system within which they find themselves and which they blame for the problem.\textsuperscript{174}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{169} Touraine, \textit{Production de la société}, 34.; Eyerman and Jamison, \textit{Social Movements}, 26-27.
\bibitem{174} Porta and Diani. \textit{Social Movements}, 16.
\end{thebibliography}
A common consensus is that social movements are more likely to develop when the prevailing political environment is less inhibiting toward the expression of social actors' claims and demands.\(^\text{175}\) In contrast, social movements are more likely to decline when political climates prove to be excessively austere. In the words of Cynthia L. Irvin,

'\[\text{[t]he more open a regime is, \ldots the more likely it is to recognize the legitimacy of grievances and demands lodged against it and the more willing it may be to negotiate some of the demands. In open regimes, public demonstrations of dissent are apt to be viewed as legitimate expressions of political dissatisfaction, and acts of protest regarded as political, not criminal. Protest, therefore, is more likely to be confined to the civil arena.}\]'.\(^\text{176}\)

A political opportunity structure is intrinsically linked to the resources which help social actors seize the opportunities which they consider to be profitable. The concept of resources is often vaguely defined by resource mobilization theorists.\(^\text{177}\) Nonetheless, a working definition has been given by Anthony Oberschall that resources can be both material and non-material including money, moral commitment, skills, networks and trust.\(^\text{178}\) A flexible political environment facilitates collective action but resources allow social actors to turn this development to their advantage.\(^\text{179}\) In the absence of resources, social actors can hardly benefit from the opportunities that open up to them.\(^\text{180}\)

Generally, resource mobilization theorists emphasize that formal and informal networks enable social actors to assemble, explore and share objectives, gather volunteers for a cause, or recruit new members, thereby contributing to the formation of a social movement. While a political opportunity structure approach corresponds to a Marxist interpretation of how broader circumstances determine the action of individuals in general, a resource mobilization approach focuses on the ability of individuals to act upon those circumstances by creating new resources or mobilizing available ones in order to achieve their

\(^{175}\) Martin, *Understanding Social Movements*, 253.


\(^{177}\) McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, 32.


\(^{179}\) McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, 32.

\(^{180}\) McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, 43.
objectives. However, from both perspectives, social movements are seen to be composed of politically committed individuals who believe they can bring about change by mobilizing collectively, in an organized manner.

McAdam applies the concept of a political opportunity structure and resource mobilization to his study of the civil rights movement and the black insurgency in the United States, focusing on the period between 1961 and 1965. He builds his approach on three pillars: political opportunities, preexisting indigenous networks, and cognitive liberation. First, he looks at the decreasing 'power disparity' between the insurgents and the elite as a political opportunity that opens up to the former group. As the foundations of the political system are shaken by this shift of relations, the aggrieved population of Southern blacks are encouraged in their conviction that a collective action would be less risky to undertake, and hypothetically, would have higher chances to succeed.

McAdam then notes that the Southern black community had historically been disadvantaged by the racial status quo. Nevertheless, they were able to maintain indigenous resources, which would later become a catalyst for organized collective action. Particularly, Churches, Colleges and the NAACP (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) were places where they had raised a collective consciousness of relegation for many years. These became organizational strongholds in the 1960s, securing them a sustainable protest capacity.

Decomposing indigenous resources present in the Southern black community, McAdam offers an operational definition to this concept, under the rubrics of Members, Established Structure of Solidarity Incentives, Communication Network, and Leaders. First of all,

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182 Martin, *Understanding Social Movements*, 35.
185 Idem.
indigenous organizations facilitate member recruitment. Secondly, individuals participate in collective action in solidarity with their fellow participants and their organizational membership and movement participation can overlap. The logic of solidarity incentives is a successful attempt to solve Olson's free-rider paradox in collective action. Thirdly, indigenous organizations serve as a communication network, which is a necessary condition for a social movement to take hold among its population and spread. Ultimately, indigenous organizations are a hub for 'recognized leaders' who can be urged upon by movement participants for their charisma, their know-how in community organizing and other skills. One should bear in mind, however, that organizations are not social movements in themselves. They are formal networks which may or may not operate, once again, depending on shifting political circumstances. For example, Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani have taken the concept of resources a step further by focusing on the relationship between formal organizations and informal networks to better define how organizations and individuals converge in pursuit of a common strategy.

The third point of McAdam's analysis is cognitive liberation. It is the result of a transformation in the minds of social actors through which they begin to regard their condition as one of injustice, and collectively create the power to change it. The possibility of this necessary cognitive liberation happening depends largely on the first two conditions: 'shifting political conditions supply the necessary “cognitive cues” capable of triggering the process of cognitive liberation while existent organizations afford insurgents the stable group-settings within which that process is most likely to occur.'

190 McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 45.
191 Olson hypothesized that individuals are motivated by a perspective of personal gain in the absence of which it is only under specific incentives that they might decide to act in a group. Otherwise, they will think not to get involved, especially if the collective stated goal is believed to equally benefit everyone, in which case will wait until others bear the burdens or costs, so that they are able to benefit from the overall positive outcome without much effort i.e., free rider. Olson's theory is dismissive of diverse cultural or solidarity settings, which could exist in a society and potentially motivate people in their collective actions. Source: Olson, Mancur. The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965.
192 McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 46.
193 McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 47.
194 Porta and Diani. Social Movements, 25.
195 Porta and Diani. Social Movements, 21.
196 McAdam, Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 51.
The concept of resource mobilization plays an important role in the analysis of social movements, but it sometimes fails to provide a full account of the processes through which social actors interpret the environment which pushes them toward collective action.\textsuperscript{197} To complete the picture, most scholars refer to \textit{identity} as a sense of operational collective belonging, in which individuals and organizations are inextricably connected with one another.\textsuperscript{198}

\textit{Collective identity.}

The concept of collective identity is present in both nationalism and social movement studies. For instance, collective identity can turn into a very influential discourse to carry out political projects of nationalist integration or secession.\textsuperscript{199} Strong feelings of personal identification to a collectivity is also an important element of social movements. Both social and nationalist movements, 'try to mobilize popular support through discursive practices and symbolic displays that foster group identities.'\textsuperscript{200}

A general consensus on social movements, which can also be applied to nationalism, is that a collective identity must reflect a sense of shared collectivity among diverse participants. Some authors have referred to this as \textit{oneness}, \textit{we-ness} or even \textit{sameness}.\textsuperscript{201}

'Although there is no consensual definition of \textit{collective identity}, discussions of the concept invariably suggest that its essence resides in a shared sense of “one-ness” or “we-ness” anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity and in relation or contrast to one or more actual or imagined sets of “others.”'\textsuperscript{202}

Rogers Brubaker objects to these notions and encourages us to de-essentialize identity and examine it under its \textit{practices}, rather than assuming its existence as given.\textsuperscript{203} Although

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{198} Porta and Diani. \textit{Social Movements}, 21-22.
\item \textsuperscript{199} Calhoun, \textit{Nations Matter}; 80.
\item \textsuperscript{202} Snow, “Identity Dilemmas, Discursive Fields, Identity Work, and Mobilization,” 267.
\item \textsuperscript{203} Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond “Identity,”” 7.
\end{itemize}
Snow and McAdam further admit that a collective identity might indeed reflect some kind of sameness among members of an ethnie or citizens in a country, they, too, do not assume this will automatically generate an operational collective identity, '[i]nstead, the development and expression of collective identity are often triggered by contentious encounters among conflicting groups.'

In what can be understood as another counter-argument to essential paradigms, Asef Bayat suggests that we think of collective identity as an expression of imagined solidarities among participants of a movement. 'A]n “imagined solidarity” is (...) one which is forged spontaneously among different actors who come to a consensus by imagining, subjectively constructing, common interests and shared values between themselves.' Bayat comes to this conclusion on the grounds that social movement actors initially belong to heterogenous groups and may disagree on many things because of their subjectivities, divergent worldviews and personal experiences. Therefore, it would be a mistake to generalize on the idea of shared beliefs and values to be the sole basis on which collective action takes place. Drawing on the example of Egyptian Islamism, Bayat notes that participants of this current came from diverse backgrounds and did not share a collective identity in absolute terms, but converged over a particular issue, which secured collective action, which in this case, was the desire of all for change.

Scholars refer to the ways in which activists pursue a common goal either by relating to a collective identity or by directly sharing something they define as such with one another. Oftentimes, the boundaries between collective action and collective identity are blurred. As readers, we are left to think that they are the same thing. Melucci thinks of collective action within a system of both opportunities and constraints perceived by social actors, where they capitalize on the former while trying to overcome the latter. Melucci's emphasis on opportunities and constraints affirms that structural conditions do have an influence on collective action but that the way social actors act within society and cooperate with one

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another is actually how their collective identity is built.208

Della Porta and Diani posit that, '[i]dentity construction is an essential component of collective action. It enables actors engaged in conflict to see themselves as people linked by interests, values, common histories – or else as divided by these same factors.'209 In fact, by mobilizing their social networks, or advocacy networks210 as well as resources and existing interpersonal links, social actors purposefully 'give sense to their being together'211 in a more concerted way. Sharing a similar understanding of the world, they develop a collective political awareness that leads to some kind of collective action.212

As William Gamson suggests, '[w]hen people bind their fate to the fate of a group, they feel personally threatened when the group is threatened. Solidarity and collective identity operate to blur the distinction between individual and group interest, undermining the premises on which (...) utilitarian models operate.'213 Furthermore, Della Porta and Diani add that, '[e]qually indispensable is the identification of the “other” defined as responsible for the actor's condition and against which the mobilization is called.'214 It is precisely throughout these processes that a collective identity is constructed, based on a shared sense of being something, implying a positive bond with the group, but also not being something, implying a negative detachment from the opponent.

In a further effort to unravel the ambiguous concept of identity, Gamson posits that 'collective identity concerns the mesh between the individual and cultural systems. More specifically, (...) individuals' sense of who they are becomes engaged with a definition shared by coparticipants in some effort at social change – that is, with who “we” are.”215 The “we” deployed in collective protest,

'(...) fall[s] somewhere along a continuum between embedded identities that

209 Porta and Diani. Social Movements, 113.
214 Porta and Diani. Social Movements, 94.
correspond to identifications that inform people's routine social lives (such as
gender, race, ethnicity, locality and kinship), and detached identities that invoke
associational memberships, nationalities (…) and other self-defining experiences.\(^{216}\)

All the aforementioned authors prioritize a constructionist and interactionist approach, in
which social actors identify themselves and their actions in relation with what they share
with others but also how they differ from them. As Ted Margadant perfectly notes, '[s]ocial
movements are interactive processes of collective action, not solitary groups based on
stable identities.'\(^{217}\) On one hand, one's collective identity emerges from a set of
interactions, exchanges, conflicts and negotiations among individuals and cultural systems,
but on the other hand this collective identity might have certain static aspects despite its
changing dynamics.\(^{218}\) A collective identity is therefore subject to tension between the
permanent and the dynamic aspects of singular identities.

\(^{216}\) Taylor, Verta. “Mobilizing for Change in a Social Movement Society.” Contemporary Sociology, 29.1

\(^{217}\) Margadant, “Commentary on Charles Tilly's 'Social Movements,'” 481.

\(^{218}\) For further discussion of this issue: Melucci, Alberto. “The Process of Collective Identity.” In Social
Movements and Culture, edited by Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, 41-63. London and New York:
Bridging nationalism and social movements

Despite the traditional link between outward or societal manifestations of nationalism and social movements, there is, somewhat surprisingly, a lack of literature bridging these two themes. Although the modern appearance of social movement theories coincided with that of the resurgence of nationalism studies in the 1960s and 1970s, there has been no widespread consensus among theorists of nationalism and proponents of social movement theories that these two fields are always interrelated. According to Andreas Wimmer and Nina Schiller, social theory has failed to address issues related to nationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century because of an academic division among disciplines and geographic locations. The study of nationalism in Europe was attributed to history whereas outside of Europe, nation-building processes and other related facts were made fields of anthropology and political science.

This *lacuna* can also be seen to be due to the assumption that presents itself when tying traditional nationalist movements comprising ethnic, military and often violent dimensions with the agendas of what are typically defined as social movements which are often considered, *prima facie*, cross-ethnic, civilian or less violent. As British sociologists Gerard Delanty and Patrick O'Mahony attest, nationalist movements have not been a major focus of the classic social theory because the latter mostly dealt with the peace, ecology or feminist movements in Western societies.

Despite any impracticalities, the relationship between nationalism and social movements is a particularly fertile area for research and there is as much to grasp from social movement theories when applied to specific nationalist contexts as the contrary. Both share

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222 Delanty and O'Mahony, *Nationalism and Social Theory*, XIV.
similarities, particularities when analyzing the ways in which they organize and mobilize around different common causes. One example concerns the resource mobilization theory, which provides a theoretical framework for the capacity of social movements to articulate their demands or claims through institutional and non-institutional means. This theory can be particularly informative when analyzing the *modus operandi* of nationalist movements. Another example concerns the salience of a collective identity, which is credited as the base of most nationalist movements, but can also apply to social movements, where identity encompasses ethnic, religious or linguistic background, but also a common purpose among participants of different socio-ethnic backgrounds.

As mentioned earlier, following the civil rights movement of the 1960s, scholarly perceptions of social movements changed radically. At around the same time, there was also a palpable shift in the perspective of nationalism scholars who started to place nationalism within a rational framework and view it as part of the process of modernization. This phenomenon has been more fully explained by the American sociologist Edward Tiryakian, who saw in the cultural and political climate of the late 1960s a new wave of social and nationalist movements led by a new generation of activists marked by a 'challenge to established authority, empathy with the “oppressed,” rejection of “the establishment” and its system of power (...), and an acute contesting of the values of modern, large-scale, industrial, capitalist, impersonal society.'

The result of this shift in thinking among scholars was that participants of both social and nationalist movements were henceforth considered as individuals with an important capacity of action, seeking to achieve shared objectives in opposition to a clearly defined

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political adversary by deploying strategies of collective claim-making. In fact, this claim-making can be considered the lowest common denominator between nationalist and social movements as the simultaneous or concomitant acts of challenging and claim-making lie at the core of any collective action which involves human participation, ideals, energy, solidarity and desire for change.

**The ethnic mobilization of the Kosovo Serbs.**

Nationalism has rarely been seen as a species of social movements, but exceptions exist. Nebojša Vladisavljević studies the grassroots mobilization of Kosovo Serbs between 1985 and 1989 from precisely this perspective. Based on local media sources and interviews with activists, Vladisavljević asserts that the mobilization of Kosovo Serbs can be better understood with insight from social movement theories. In 1985, Kosovo Serbs started a successful petition campaign during which thousands of participants called public attention to the forced migration of their fellow compatriots out of Kosovo.

What followed in the coming years was a chain of collective events ranging from long marches to street protests, from public meetings to sending delegations to speak with the Yugoslav authorities in place, both federal and communist. Over the course of four years, Kosovo Serbs denounced their harassment and intimidation by the Albanian majority as well as the state's arbitrary intervention in the protests. According to Vladisavljević, Kosovo Serbs' ethnic sufferings existed well before this mobilization. However, the political atmosphere had never proved quite as positive a terrain: 'Yugoslavia's highly decentralized political structure and the sensitivity of the party leadership to the concerns of Kosovo Serbs (...) provided the latter in the mid-1980s with opportunities to address their demands strategically from local officials to the Kosovo authorities, and from Serbia's to the federal leadership, according to changing political opportunities.'

Flexible political environments that lead activists to capitalize on the resulting opportunities to achieve their goals is a major theme of social movement theory. This was the case in

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231 Critical of the literature on opportunity structures with regard to the emergence of movements in the
the “less unfavorable” context of Yugoslavia, characterized at the time by unstable political alignments, splits amongst political elites and the emergence of new political alliances. However, this alone does not explain Serbian mobilization in Kosovo. Kosovo Serbs identified their problems as being primarily rooted in inter-ethnic inequalities tolerated by the provincial authority and their perceived feeling of increasing insecurity vis à vis the Albanians. This kind of identification of problems and the articulation of possible solutions by activists constitute framing, which is another important theme of the social movement theory developed by Gamson.

Framing has three components to it: injustice, collective identity and agency. Each of these components both identify societal problems and imply a degree of action in dealing with these. The concept of injustice addresses the feeling of unfairness and inequality, real or perceived, in any given society. The concept of identity is constructed as participants begin to distinguish themselves from the “authoritarian other” whom they hold responsible for the injustices they face. And finally, the concept of agency seeks to illustrate how participants believe they are instrumental in reversing the perceived injustice through collective action.

For social movements to achieve in the agency frame of Gamson’s typology, perceived injustice must be felt for collective identity to mobilize against the “authoritarian other.” As this collective identity mobilizes and a group becomes more acutely aware of their newly framed ontological narrative, they begin to seek agency to gain control over historicity, to borrow Alain Touraine’s terminology. A struggle over historicity is ‘the symbolic capacity of social actors to construct a system of knowledge and the technical tools that allow them to intervene in their own functioning, act upon themselves, and thereby produce society.’ Historicity is the will of individuals to be able to control their own destiny.

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former Yugoslavia, Berberoglu proposes a rather class-based analysis to understand the nationalist aspirations of the oppressed groups in this setting. For further discussion of this issue, see: Berberoglu, Berch. “Nationalism, Class Conflict and Social Transformation in the Twentieth Century.” International Review of Modern Sociology. 29. 1 (1999): 77-88. Accessed July 14, 2015. p.81
URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4142116


Indeed, by the mid-1980s, the Kosovo Serb movement was able to articulate people's grievances within the framework of ethnic inequality that resonated among larger audiences including the elderly, the youth, women, villagers and farmers, to the extent that even those Serbs remote from the initial areas of protest ended up joining the movement. Therefore, the dynamics of what was seemingly a nationalist-oriented movement could be better grasped with lessons from social movement theories. Vladisavljević's focus on Yugoslavia's state structures, cooperative and federal, proving conducive to the emergence of the Kosovo Serbs' protest movement is complemented with the concept of framing, as activists were able to effectively frame their issues.

Vladisavljević argues that nationalism, or more precisely put, expressions of a distinct national identity reflecting ethnic grievances and past conflicts with other ethnicities cannot account for a movement's emergence and growth. From this perspective, admittedly, the timing, dynamics and outcome of the Kosovo Serb movement had more to do with the state structures in which it was initially incubated, as well as subsequently with those political opportunities that activists were able to exploit, than their ethnic and nationalist attachments. My view converges with Vladisavljević's analysis in two ways. First, a Kurdish nationalism theory would fall short of explaining the demands and mobilization of Kurdish activists, particularly post-2000. Second, the political opportunity structure and framing of injustices have also determined the trajectory of the Kurdish movement as a fully-fledged social movement. My view diverges from Vladisavljević's in that I do not consider the Kurdish movement (particularly post-2000) as a nationalist movement better understood through the social movement theory. I consider the Kurdish movement as a social movement with nationalist overtones due to its past marked by an aspiration to achieve a Kurdish nation-state.

Vladisavljević's analysis of the Kosovo Serb movement bears similarities with David Romano's analysis of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. Both authors consider the movements under their examination as ethnic or nationalist movements best understood through the social movement theory. Whereas Vladisavljević has made Kosovo Serbs an ideal case for the application of political opportunity structure showing how activists were
able to turn the flexible conditions to their advantage and framed issues related to their sentiment of injustice vis-à-vis the dominant group; Romano applies the same literature to find out that it did not quite apply to the Kurdish example.²³⁵ The political system in Turkey remained extremely centralized and repressive vis-à-vis Kurdish activists for most of the republican era, and did not provide the latter with the same opportunities for mobilization. In terms of organization methods and creation of resources for a movement,²³⁶ Romano notes that the Kurds were not offered material compensation by their pioneers and that those who mobilized used sacrifice, solidarity and collective consciousness as incentives. Therefore, Romano ultimately pins down the core of his analysis on the articulations of a Kurdish collective identity, which he thinks was more accurate in explaining the solidarity mechanisms that he came across in the Kurdish movement between 1925 and 2004.²³⁷

Reconciling nationalism and social movements with contentious politics.

Not satisfied with the existing literature, including the classic social movement agenda that they had contributed to themselves, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly decide to pursue a more generalizable theory through which a wide range of phenomena could be compared and analyzed, from the most pacifist social movements to ferocious nationalist wars. They call this new program of study *contentious politics*.²³⁸ In this way, they advance a way to bridge the gap between social movements and nationalism and the wars, revolutions, ethnic mobilization, and democratization they entail.

In its least complicated formulation, contentious politics refers to collective political struggles,²³⁹ characterized by similar components and most importantly, recurrent patterns, which would ideally benefit scholars for sharing mutual knowledge and methodology.²⁴⁰ In order to enhance our understanding of collective political struggles, authors suggested that we first adopt a *relational* approach among theories that have so far prevailed in the

²³⁹ McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of contention*, 5.
²⁴⁰ McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of contention*, 4, 9, 10.
literature such as structuralism, rationality, phenomenology and culture.\textsuperscript{241}

Tilly and his colleagues come from a structuralist background.\textsuperscript{242} Much of their attention has been devoted to the relationship between individuals or groups and overarching systems that we generally call societies.\textsuperscript{243} In their analysis of social movements, they have demonstrated the extent to which social change can stem from existing, changing or new political opportunity structures in which activists mobilize, form and effectively frame their collective claims. From a structuralist point of view, it is the political environment along with a plethora of other objective structural factors such as threats, elements of culture, and resources that activists possess at the time of contention that affect and shape individual consciousness. Contrarily, rationalists have hypothesized that if members of a group pursue a common objective, they are necessarily motivated by the perspective of personal gain, unless they are coerced to do so. From a rationalist viewpoint, individuals take part in contention not in reaction to structural challenges or opportunities, but in response to the social and/or financial incentives perceived. For Mancur Olson, instigator of the rational choice theory, in the absence of specific incentives, individuals seem somehow reluctant to act for a collective purpose.\textsuperscript{244}

Proponents of phenomenology have also focused on individuals, but rather on their state of consciousness and experiences as the motives for their involvement in collective purposes.\textsuperscript{245} Phenomenologists, as opposed to rationalists, do not consider individuals as merely rationally calculating, seeking to maximize self-interest in every possible way, for this cannot fully explain their participation in collective action, particularly in oppressive settings. Culturalists have mostly linked individual participation in collective action with the significance of one's belonging in a distinctive collectivity.\textsuperscript{246} Culturalists, like phenomenologists, see a causal link among cultural norms, belief systems and individual experiences.

\textsuperscript{241} McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, \textit{Dynamics of contention}, 20.
\textsuperscript{242} McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, \textit{Dynamics of contention}, 22.
\textsuperscript{243} McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, \textit{Dynamics of contention}, 21.
\textsuperscript{244} Olson, \textit{The Logic of Collective Action}, Introduction.
\textsuperscript{245} McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, \textit{Dynamics of contention}, 21.
\textsuperscript{246} McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, \textit{Dynamics of contention}, 22.
All four of these traditions have enriched our understandings of social change in various ways and remain to this day valid tools when analyzing different dynamics of collective action. However, as mentioned earlier, Tilly and his colleagues suggest to embrace a relational approach (these theories being closely related to one another), and, I would add, an interactional one, which would help 'treat social interaction, social ties, communication, and conversation not merely as expressions of structure, rationality, consciousness, or culture but as active sites of creation and change.'

Contentious politics is based on 'interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants.' In other words, contentious politics oppose claim makers to others with stakes bearing on each of the parties involved, and where a government is typically a target, if not itself a claimant. The authors argue that one has to distinguish between contained (institutional) and transgressive (unconventional) contention, giving more importance to the latter not only because important societal changes often result from transgressive contention but also because it is considered more fertile ground for new actors and innovative collective action to emerge. Transgressive contention exceeds the limits of established institutional boundaries within which otherwise contained contention occurs.

Contention ranges from revolutions, calls for democratization, uprisings, civil rights movements, ethnic conflicts, wars, nationalist struggles and many more, all of which, albeit their totally different outcomes, are driven by similar causal mechanisms. If we take the example given by the authors of the events of the 1789 French revolution that overflowed into Parisian streets, it becomes possible to grasp the spirit of contentious politics. 'Tumults,' 'mass marches,' 'gatherings,' 'electoral assemblies,' 'breaking into prisons and other public buildings,' 'freeing prisoners,' 'seizing arms,' and 'killings' are only some

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247 The idea of explaining social phenomena by other social phenomena belongs originally to Durkheim. However, here the authors give a specific focus to the interaction between social phenomena: McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of contention*, 22.

248 McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of contention*, 5.

249 McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of contention*, 8

250 McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of contention*, 37

251 McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of contention*, 3-4.
expressions of the collective unrest, or contentious politics for that matter, that shook Paris and the rest of France in a revolution toward the end of the eighteenth century. Viewed like this, the specific features of the French revolution are not so different from many other collective episodes of contention that have been seen in history around the world.

Through the lens of contentious politics, one comes to identify similar and recurrent patterns in each contention, from the French revolution to the civil rights movements in America.²⁵² These commonalities and recurrences are as follows. Although each contentious episode might lead to a completely different outcome, the fact is that contention emerges in each of them in the form of innovative collective action. As the conflict deepens or comes to an end, we see the emergence of new actors entering the scene, which leads to an identity shift among existing and new actors. Competitions, brokerage, factional divisions or change of strategy among contenders²⁵³ lead to further alignments, divisions or realignments in the context of contentious mobilization or demobilization.²⁵⁴

'Nationalism is part of struggle – contentious politics, in our lexicon.'²⁵⁵ posit the authors. Placed within contentious politics, nationalism is like every other episode of contention. In this regard, there is no point in lingering in the debate over whether nationalism is subjective, objective, ethnic or civic; it suffices to focus on how nationalism can be the consequence of its changing political environment and how it struggles to overcome institutional constraints along the way.

Tilly and his colleagues argue that nationalism may arise or diminish as a result of contention between at least two parties i.e., claimants of a cause and their object of claims, typically an established authority. Even more interesting is their conclusion that nationalism, loyal to the spirit of contentious politics and contrary to generally accepted ideas, has indeed very little to do with nationalist concepts.²⁵⁶ To illustrate their argument, they refer to two different episodes in history: the national unification of much of Italy in

²⁵² McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, Dynamics of contention, 32-33.
²⁵³ Term used by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly.
²⁵⁴ McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, Dynamics of contention, 33.
²⁵⁵ McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, Dynamics of contention, 227.
²⁵⁶ Idem.
the 1860s and the national disintegration of the Soviet Union throughout the 1980s.

These two diametrically opposed nationalist trends are observed under the amalgam of 'opportunity spirals, identity shift, competition, and brokerage'\(^{257}\) and have little to do with nationalism *per se*. The authors go beyond the traditional scope of nationalism, though only to accept that nationalism is *imagined*, putting aside the needless dichotomy often created between objective versus subjective; oppressor versus oppressed; and ethnic versus civic nationalism. In this light, Italians managed to form a national unity not through an articulation of their unified nationalistic vision of things (which did not not exist at the time of unification) but through a

'mobilization and counter-mobilization of competitors for the national mantle (e.g., Cavour, Garibaldi, Mazzini, and their respective followers) followed [by] the logic of opportunity spiral, (...) rapid identity shifts for political activists who had initially mobilized against local and regional enemies, [and] direct competition for internationally recognized national power (...).'\(^{258}\)

From a strict nationalist perspective, the internal and regional cleavages among Italians should have impeded their nation-building in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

As for the Soviet Union, it gradually disintegrated toward the end of the twentieth century to breed several smaller states. It was highly decentralized in terms of governance but held a strong and overarching national unity in the form of one party-governance. However, as the authority of the central state declined, existing republics strove for greater sub-national autonomy. Identities shifted from belonging to the Party towards new images of ethnicity. Ultimately, existing republics competed over resources previously under Soviet control in the name of the then separately emerging ethnic or national identities.\(^{259}\)

Contentious politics has its merits, but might be too broad a project to be applied to each case of contention. It certainly allows us to compare a wide range of phenomena that we might assume to have nothing in common, such as the Arab spring movements and the French revolution, or the Mau Mau uprisings in British-colonized Kenya and the Yellow

\(^{257}\) McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of contention*, 228.
\(^{258}\) McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of contention*, 262.
\(^{259}\) McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, *Dynamics of contention*, 247-254.
revolution of the Philippines. But it remains a comparative tool and runs the risk of overshadowing the nuances of the spirit of each of these movements. However, for the purpose of this chapter, which is to explore the relationship between nationalism and other social phenomena, it has been important to observe the manner in which nationalist movements can be seen as part of contentious politics.

260 Except for the Arab spring, the aforementioned examples are all provided by the authors of *Dynamics of contention*. 
Refining the link between nationalism and social movements

As opposed to integrating within an established political system through social movements, nationalist movements often defend the separateness of a specific ethnic group. A nationalist current is born when a certain community sharing an ethnic or national identity finds this identity to be threatened for reasons which it deems to be illegitimate. Nationalists, like social movement participants, address their demands directly to the established authorities under and against which they operate, but seek autonomy on behalf of the ethnic group which they claim to represent.

Nationalist movements, by their nature, are difficult forces to incorporate into established states within which they develop. Precisely because of the difficulty of reconciling competing nationalist currents, they are often articulated in ways which may include claims for secession, independence or separation. The former Yugoslav Republic which was subsequently divided into new states on the basis of ethnic and nationalist grounds is a prime example of this.

Whereas nationalism can primarily be seen as the assertion of national identity or belonging in opposition to an outside threatening force, social movements are, conversely, built primarily on the assumption of belonging and of working within a system to which the participants belong, whether it be regionally, nationally or globally. Whilst nationalist movements generally comprise members of a shared ethnie, social movements usually comprise participants with a shared purpose, often irrespective of their ethnic background, the importance of which is outweighed by the goals of social change which are their objectives.


In the case of partially met claims, nationalist movements can evolve into social movements.

My contribution to these debates is that nationalist movements evolve into social movements when great strides have been made, but the ultimate objective of statehood has not been achieved. In countries in which different nationalist currents or identities compete, pressure from nationalist movements is likely to persist if the national question is not fully resolved either through (forced) integration or secession. This has proven to be the case, even if their modes of expression, terms of articulation and ultimate objectives mutate or evolve. In the (Spanish) Basque, the (British) Irish and the (Turkish) Kurdish cases there was a shift in the national aims and objectives before their complete realization. This can be understood in the context of armed struggles for secession failing to meet their primary objectives, with a social movement subsequently emerging which then articulates both nationalist and social claims within the context of the existing state.

Yet it is important to bear in mind that for these movements, the national question is far from being, and may well not ever be considered, a closed chapter in their history. There might be a significant number of Irish nationalists (North and South) favoring a unified independent Irish state which would include the secession of Northern Ireland from the UK. There are still Basque nationalists agitating for a unified Basque country which would include historic Basque territories not only in Spain but also in France. Likewise, there are Kurdish nationalists who persist their calls for an independent Kurdistan, to include all major Kurdish communities in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Such nationalist ideals and ambitions, even in the light of the significant gains made by nationalist movements, continue to resonate among grassroot factions of the movement and often among the youth, and should not go unperceived in the analysis. However, such persistence in nationalist movements belie the more striking trend that once-fervent nationalist movements can find themselves opting to operate within electoral and institutional frameworks. This can have a significant impact on the ways in which they mobilize both themselves and their wider audience to challenge the targeted state's mechanisms.

See Cynthia L. Irvin for the extracts of original ETA documents and an analysis based on the interviews conducted with ETA activists. Irvin, Militant Nationalism, 20-21.
**The Basque example.**

By the start of the twenty-first century, the Basques had achieved, after more than a century of mobilization, a significant degree of autonomy from the Spanish mainland. The mobilization of Basques around a Basque national identity included a rich repertoire of action such as lobbying, public gatherings, use of media, participation in elections and violence by the Basque armed group ETA, an acronym for *Basque Euskadi Ta Askatasuna.* In the autumn of 2010, the ETA declared that it would be putting an end to its military campaign. This declaration came after the Basques were given a certain degree of autonomy but before they had achieved full independence. This trajectory confirms the theory whereby, with Spain having partially “dealt with” the Basque national question, the Basque nationalist movement persisted but, as ETA’s declaration indicates, opting for a more social, legal, political strategy to accomplish its nationalist objectives, which ultimately meant secession from Spain.

Ludger Mees saw in the social movement theory a better way to explain this evolution of the contemporary Basque movement as being both a nationalist and a social movement. Indeed, for Mees, ‘nationalism – apart from being a language and symbolism as well as an ideology of the nation – is also a sociopolitical movement.’ According to his schema, movements, no matter what their point of departure, deploy the same organizational and mobilization techniques in order to achieve their objectives. He then applies this theory to the development of Basque nationalism in the Basque country.

Mees notes that from as early as the fifteenth century there had been a growing national

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265 *Basque Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*, in English, Basque Homeland and Liberty, is known mostly for its military campaigns for the creation of an independent Basque state.


268 Mees, “Politics, Economy, or Culture?” 315.
awareness among the Basques based on shared history, language and culture distinct from the nation-states (Spain and France) within which the Basque communities had come to reside. He qualifies this period as the Basque *protonationalist* phase, characterized by a growing collective consciousness of and self-identification as being a people distinct from the states in which they resided. Over the course of the last century, Basque nationalists have strived for the Basque people's right to autonomy in their historic territories; these Basque nationalist claims have achieved an agreement for shared sovereignty with Spain.

More recently, the Basque nationalist legacy has yielded the articulation of a contemporary Basque social movement, which has seen, *inter alia*, the ETA's questioning of the true impact and effectiveness of its armed campaign, the participation of both Basque and Spanish civil society organizations in diverse political processes, the activities of human rights associations, and the participation of Basque political parties and actors during elections and other governmental and democratic campaigns.

It follows that the growing Basque social movement has complimented the efforts of the nationalist movement of the previous centuries in its claims to rectify the historically disadvantaged position of the Basque community vis à vis the Spanish mainland and today, the nationalist and social elements of this movement are intertwined and cannot be dissociated from each other. In the autonomous Basque country, activists continue to agitate for independence and the release of Basque political prisoners without recourse to violent nationalism.

*The Northern Irish example.*

In reference to Northern Ireland, when significant progress had been made by the nationalist movement, the hegemony of violence was surpassed by the soft power brought about by the dynamics of a socio-political movement. The Irish Republican Army, IRA declared an end to its military campaign in 1994. On April 10, 1998, the Good Friday

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270 Mees, “Politics, Economy, or Culture?” 318.
Agreement was signed between the Irish and the UK governments and brought executive power-sharing between unionist and nationalist communities. Since then, significantly greater focus and energy have been devoted by the British and Irish communities to the establishment and maintaining of a stable constitutional coexistence, while violence has been at an all-time low despite post-agreement hardships i.e., the decommissioning of the IRA, the issue of paramilitary and political prisoners and other economic and social concerns.

According to James Goodman, the roots of constitutional arrangements in view of the resolution of the Northern Irish conflict can be traced back to the termination of Westminster's direct rule in Northern Ireland in 1999. This was also partly triggered by Sinn Fein's increasing political activities during this period. In fact, in 1992, Sinn Fein had published a policy document, entitled Toward a lasting peace, signaling already 'a shift away from the all-or-nothing discourse of military conflict to the more compromising discourse of democratic politics.' These developments have underpinned the peace process that began in the ensuing years, opening a path for the resolution of the Northern Irish conflict without further recourse to military action.

Nicholas Acheson and Carl Milofsky specifically draw attention to the social movement aspect of the Northern Irish movement throughout the phases publicly known as Peace I (1995-1999) and Peace II (2000-2006). The two peace programs were funded and implemented by the European Union (EU) to address the immediate problems arisen from the conflict, to seize the opportunities created by peace and to foster cohesion and socio-

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274 “Good Friday Agreement 10 April 1998.” BBC History. Date of online publication is not specified.


277 Goodman, Nationalism and Transnationalism, 97-98.

economic growth amongst the communities involved. Acheson and Milofsky argue that under *Peace I*, the civil society in the form of voluntary and community organizations were very active in the 'process of cross-community network building, project development, and reconciliation that was integral to the cessation of violence.'\(^{279}\)

At least two factors facilitated the emergence of a social movement at the time. The first is that when EU officials came to Belfast in 1994, they prioritized the implementation of a multi-layered cooperation with civil society members in order to attain social inclusion. Furthermore, such policy assumption matched the mindset of elites within civil society, 'who were looking to the European Commission as a counter-weight to a national government and direct rule administration that was perceived as unsympathetic to their preferred policies on issues such as poverty and long-term unemployment.'\(^{280}\) The second is the change in the Northern Irish government's attitude towards voluntary and local community organizations not as a potential bid for separatist activities or complicit of armed campaign, but rather influential and legitimate actors that contribute to the realization of common social and political objectives.\(^{281}\)

During the *Peace II phase*, more focus and energy was devoted to institutional and electoral politics. The Good Friday Agreement provided significant power to locally elected representatives in particular, and 'the priorities for peace building (...) came to be focused on the institutional redress of grievances through equality legislation, a reformed police service and economic development.'\(^{282}\) In sum, the nuances between *Peace I* and *Peace II* do not affect the overall argument that in the process of significant political gains, the nationalist movements take on more of a social twist and begin to channel their energy on the consolidation of peace and social equality. In Northern Ireland, this was firstly made possible through the engagement of voluntary local community organizations, and secondly through electoral politics.

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\(^{280}\) Acheson and Milofsky, “Northern Ireland Ten Years after the Agreement,” 72.

\(^{281}\) Acheson and Milofsky, “Northern Ireland Ten Years after the Agreement,” 72-73.

\(^{282}\) Acheson and Milofsky, “Northern Ireland Ten Years after the Agreement,” 75.
The Kurdish example in Turkey.

With regard to the Kurdish movement, in the early years of the Turkish republic the Turkish state saw it as a religious and tribal matter; in the 1960s as an Eastern problem; and in later years as a terror issue. In the 1990s, this has slightly started to change at the discursive level, and the “Kurdish reality” has entered the political scene thereafter. Whilst a guest in Diyarbakır in December 1991, Süleyman Demirel declared that recognizing the Kurdish reality was a must:

"Turkey has to recognize the Kurdish reality. We can no longer claim that [they are not] Kurds but Turks, or that both descend from Central Asia, [it is not] that our languages have changed along the way. We [the Turks and the Kurds] are the founding peoples of this state. When the Ottoman empire collapsed, two big nations survived: the Turks and the Kurds."

As such, for the first time in Turkish republic's history, Demirel, who became the Turkish prime minister after the general elections that year, was admitting the Kurdish reality. A little while later, this time Turgut Özal, then Turkish president, was publicly mentioning that his grandmother had been of Kurdish origin. What followed was Özal's move toward recognizing Kurdish reality further. Özal hosted several meetings in Ankara with the Iraqi Kurdish president of the Patriotic Union Party (PUK), Jalal Talabani, amid tensions and despite the continuing low-conflict war with the PKK in Turkey's mountainous regions. The renowned Turkish journalist Cengiz Çandar provided first-hand insight into the

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284 Yayman, Hüseyin. *Şark Meselesinden Demokratik Açılma | Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorunu Hafızası* [From the Eastern question to the Democratic Opening | Turkey's Kurdish memory]. Ankara: SETA Report, April 2011. XII.


rapprochement between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish representatives. As a special adviser to Özal between 1991 and 1993, Çandar underlined that Özal wanted to end the armed conflict with the Kurds through mediation and considered them to be a natural ally of Turkey. In fact, Özal was the first Turkish president ever to officially receive a Kurdish representative. Moreover, given Talabani's proximity with the PKK, these encounters were considered an indirect communication between the Turkish state and the PKK. Özal seemed to have in mind the resolution of the Kurdish question through a federal system and general amnesty. His sudden death on April 17, 1993, however, dashed hopes for peace and dragged Turkey into a “dirty war” throughout the 1990s.

In December 1999, the president of the Motherland Party (known by the Turkish acronym ANAP), and later prime minister Mesut Yılmaz, in his election meeting in Diyarbakır, publicly stated that, 'the road of the European Union passes through Diyarbakır.' This declaration came in the aftermath of the Helsinki summit in 1999, where Turkey was granted official candidate status to the EU. Despite these vows however, the Kurdish question remained to be resolved.

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Çandar, Mezopotamya Ekspresi, 112.


Çandar, Mezopotamya Ekspresi, 27.

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The term dirty war refers to kidnapping, torture and murder of civilians by a Turkish deep-state organization, known as JITEM. For more details, see: Yağcı, Soner. *Binbaşı Ersever’in İtirafları* [Confessions of Major Ersever] İstanbul: Kaynak, 1995.; Şahan, Timur, and Balık Uğur. *İtirafları – Bir JITEM’ci anlattı* [From the accounts of a JITEM informant] Cologne: Weşanên Serxwebun, 2005.

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Çandar, Mezopotamya Ekspresi, 27.
In 1999 Abdullah Öcalan was captured by the Turkish authorities in Kenya. To understand how the Kurdish movement began functioning as a social movement, one has to consider the chain of events that started with Öcalan's incarceration in İmralı island in 1999. To the surprise of many, Öcalan maintained that the resolution of the Kurdish question was dependent on Turkey's full democratization since day one of his trial, not to mention the first sentences he uttered on the plane registered by his captors: 'If an opportunity is given I am ready to serve Turkey.' Many interpretations may well be advanced to analyze Öcalan's stance. It is possible that he thought he should continue to guide the PKK's strategy, even from prison. Or he thought over the movement he initiated and decided for a paradigm change. Perhaps he was persuaded that the hostilities between the PKK and the Turkish state should stop no matter what happens, therefore embarked on a quest to establish peace with the Turkish authorities. Whatever interpretation one shall advance, one thing remains certain: Öcalan's declarations have marked the end of a movement and the beginning of a new one.

It was in 2002 that state-of-emergency protocols (in Turkish, Olağanüstü Hal, OHAL) were lifted in Turkey's Kurdish regions. This was a time when, instead of independence through military means, the Kurdish movement had gradually started to declare its wish to be granted constitutional guarantees so the Kurds could be recognized as a distinct entity. In other words, the Kurds would not object to live under the roof of a Turkish state as long as their expressions as a political and cultural entity would be tolerated within the broader context of democracy and human rights.

According to Çandar, the speech delivered by the prime minister Erdoğan on August 12, 2005 in Diyarbakır was another first serious step undertaken toward the acknowledgement of the Kurdish reality since Özal's death:

'The Kurdish problem is our problem. I declare as the prime minister of this country that the Kurdish problem is, first and foremost, my problem. We are a big country. We will resolve all of our problems with more democracy, more rights for citizens.'

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300 The video recording is available on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBBmvB4z-cU

301 Çandar, Mezopotamya Ekspressi, 29.
and more prosperity.\textsuperscript{302}

The origins of the 2013 peace process launched by Turkish authorities, the PKK and Öcalan can be traced back to these very shifts i.e., the lifting of Ankara's emergency protocols in the Kurdish regions, the discourse and practices adopted by the Kurdish movement post-2000 that envisioned the resolution of the Kurdish question along with Turkey's democratization, and the gradual changes in the Turkish government's attitude toward recognizing the Kurdish issue.

The bottom line is that from the 2000 onward, the political context in Turkey represented a stage where neither the Kurdish movement had achieved its initially-stated goals in their entirety nor had the Turkish state with its military been able to extinguish Kurdish aspirations as vowed. It seemed that the Turkish state could no longer deny the Kurdish reality or ever again insist on old methods when facing the Kurdish question. This was the beginning of a less unfavorable political environment for Turkey's Kurds by which I do not mean that state repression totality disappeared or Turkey became a fully-established democracy. What I mean is that Kemalist taboos were loosened, facilitating public discussion on the Kurdish conflict. In brief, the Turkish state could no longer deny the existence of a Kurdish reality on its soil.

It turned out Kurdish activists were able to capitalize on this, focusing their energy more onto changing aspects of the overall society in which they live, namely by proposing to amend the constitution and gradually replacing militancy with non-violent forms of struggle as their principal mode of protest (will be discussed in detail in Chapter IV). Thus, the Turkish state having “partially” dealt with the Kurdish national question through recognition of the Kurdish reality, the traditional separate rhetoric of the Kurds in Turkey was abandoned in favor of advocating a “common and dignified” coexistence of both Kurds and Turks within a democratic, multi-ethnic but united Turkey.

While Kurdish identity claims have been undeniably present and palpably so, such claims

\textsuperscript{302} Extract from Erdoğan's speech, available on YouTube: \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5D1ezQ0w7w} (My translation from Turkish).
were no longer articulated in the context of the desire for the establishment of a separate Kurdish nation-state. This brings back the Basque example where violent agitation to achieve Basque nationalist aims gave way to other forms of struggle and activists operated within the established framework of the overarching nation-state to which they belonged. Likewise, Kurdish identity claims have evolved towards manifestations that suggest a willingness to work within the existing political system in Turkey, albeit calling for significant change including a re-evaluation and redrafting of the Turkish constitution, (which was established in 1980 following the military coup) as well as decentralization of power across Turkey.

This willingness seems to have been complemented by the Kurdish movement opting for a more integrating way of mobilizing and leaving behind, to a very large extent until June 2015, the armed struggle, as well as revolutionary nationalist rhetoric, which had been so prevalent in the movement pre-2000. As the Turkish government has lowered the levels of repression traditionally exercised against Kurdish activists, particularly when compared to levels of repression pre-2000, the Kurdish nationalist movement has evolved to focus its energy on everyday civil mobilization as well as conducting electoral, political, municipal, cultural and other campaigns via more peaceful, legal and mediatized means. This way, they continued to assert themselves as a Kurdish entity, yet ascribing to mainstream social movement practices.

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Concluding Remarks.

As Mees has argued, ‘nationalism – apart from being a language and symbolism as well as an ideology of the nation – is also a sociopolitical movement.’\textsuperscript{307} In reference to the Kurdish case, the Kurds have managed to sustain elements of their culture and language up to the present day. In spite of being subsumed by a nation-state, they were not culturally subsumed but were rather able to hold on to their own cultural traits. The waging periodic insurgencies throughout the twentieth century against their “oppressors” (as will be discussed in due course) have furthermore reinforced the formation of a collective Kurdish memory. It is possible to argue that the existence of Kurdish cultural traits has been the very basis for the establishment of a Kurdish nationalist movement. And, it is this nationalist movement's legacy that opened the way, as it did in the Basque case, to what we can qualify as a social movement not only in the Kurdish regions of Turkey but, more recently, across the entire county.

In Kurdish, Northern Irish and Basque cases, the partial resolution of nationalist claims facilitated the coming to the foreground of other political, economic and social issues. While social and economic problems among these communities had, of course, existed during the days of the most fervent nationalist currents, they were, at that time, considered as “secondary” issues by the organizers, leaders and activists of nationalist movements, whose primary concerns were the political recognition of their identity. The primary question of identity, has been, from the outset, a unifying cause to mobilize grassroots along nationalist lines; this cause has then been complimented by a host of other social movements established to tackle economic, political, electoral, cultural, and environmental issues befalling the communities.

Schematically, one can note that, in each of the aforementioned three cases, the “national question” had far and away been the principal issue at stake and perhaps the only cause for exchange between the nationalist movement and the state that spoke on its behalf. Further, one can also note that important transformations occurred which saw the nationalist

\textsuperscript{307} Mees, Ludger. “Politics, Economy, or Culture?” 315.
movements realizing some, if not all, of their nationalist objectives for recognition or autonomy. In Northern Ireland, the agreement of 1998 brought, in Andrew words, 'an act of recognition between states and national communities. (...) The United Kingdom has recognized the right of the people of Ireland, meaning the whole island, to exercise national self-determination, albeit conjointly and severally as “North” and “South.”'\textsuperscript{308} In 1978, the Basque country was restored its historic autonomous rights with the establishment of the State of Autonomies written in the Spanish constitution that year.\textsuperscript{309} And, in the 2000s, the Kurdish “reality” gained growing recognition in Turkey.

Social movements can be seen as a luxury of peoples whose nationalist objectives have partially, if not totally, been achieved. Social movements challenge states, without the goal of breaking away from them. The realization of a social movement can be seen as indicative of its participants' belief in their capacity to bring about change. By extension, it can be indicative of a degree of societal development. In many developed countries, participants have sought to bring about change in their societies through a wide range of purposeful collective movements, demonstrations and protests.\textsuperscript{310} Despite the fact that social movements tend to underline belonging, while nationalist movements tend to desire exclusion, it can nevertheless be argued that with reference to the Basque, Northern Irish and Kurdish movements, nationalist dynamics can turn into broader social movements.


\textsuperscript{310} Tilly identifies the examples of France, Belgium, Britain and the USA as specific political environments in which social movements were able to flourish in the past. Particularly in France and Belgium, workers were engaged in large-scale protests for a better working environment. Indeed the relative openness of the national and political settings in each of these countries played a key role in shaping the contours of social movement activities there. Tilly, Charles. \textit{Regimes and Repertoires}. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006.
CHAPTER TWO
The emergence of Kurdish nationalism

Introduction
In this chapter, I examine the historical foundations of the Kurdish people’s struggle for cultural and political identity. Assessing the prospect of any national people’s movement requires a nuanced understanding of the historical dynamics that inevitably shape contemporary political consciousness. In the case of the Kurds, these historical dynamics are particularly rich and complex and have been documented in the texts of scholars such as Fikret Başkaya, İsmail Beşikçi, Martin van Bruinessen, Gérard Chaliand, and David McDowall, to name a few.

A thorough assessment of the historical dynamics of different Kurdish movements is a critical prerequisite for contextualizing the more recent aspirations and political activities of Kurdish activists in Turkey, which lie at the core of this study. The Kurdish activists observed and interviewed in Turkey seem to have drawn important lessons from the reading of their history, holding onto the necessity of unity among the Kurds as a political or cultural force (which had been lacking) and believing that the lack of this unity would lead either to failure or delay them in achieving rights in any form as a distinct people.

The argument that emerges throughout the course of this chapter is that nationalism in the Kurdish context does not result in the creation of a Kurdish state but reinforces collective national consciousness that will serve as an important resource for more contemporary Kurdish movements in the long term. The purpose of this section in the context of my overall argument is consequently to set the historical context informing the more recent time period which is the primary subject of my analysis.

Although the scope of this study will be limited to the case of Kurdish movements in Turkey, I will first provide a brief analysis of the situation of the Kurdish people in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. I will then lay the groundwork for an understanding of Kurdish
national consciousness through the historical and anthropological literatures, followed by early Kurdish nationalist activity throughout the initial years of the Turkish republic. The chapter will go on to specifically focus on the Kurdish revolts in Turkey between 1925 and 1938, which will be examined through three main stages: the transient recognition of the Kurds; the final recognition of the Turkish State and the context for the last traditional Kurdish revolt.

I will not apply the social movement theory here, because Kurdish activists operate under heavy state repression. Their mobilization is taken as a threat to the newly-founded Turkish state, its national unity and territorial integrity. One of the main pillars of social movements, being their semi-flexible political environment, is severely closed to Kurdish demands. The resources consist of armed men and their limited supplies during the revolts. Kurdish activists lack institutions and civil society organizations to rely upon. However, we see the articulation of a collective identity that facilitates countering state repression, even though internal cleavages among different Kurdish communities do not disappear.
Kurdish communities in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran

The region often referred to as Kurdistan\textsuperscript{311} is one that is ambiguously defined. Its current legal status dates back to July 24, 1923, the date of the Treaty of Lausanne signed between Turkey and European powers including Great Britain, France and Italy.\textsuperscript{312} This treaty is particularly important, for it crystallized the division of Kurdish provinces, which had previously been formally subsumed under the Ottoman empire into provinces in the three distinct nation-states of Turkey, Iraq and Syria.\textsuperscript{313} In the years that followed the signing of the treaty, the relationship between the Kurds and their countries of residence became, and has remained, highly problematic. In fact, the Kurds have often been subject to severe political repression. For decades, the Turkish state firmly denied Kurds their Kurdish identity which had flourished prior to 1923 as a cultural force nurtured by the regional autonomy they had generally been accorded by Ottoman rulers.

A careful reading of the modern history of Turkey indicates that successive Turkish regimes repudiated the idea of a Kurdish nationalist project of any kind at different stages of the Republic.\textsuperscript{314} They considered the repudiation of Kurdish nationalist projects as necessary

\textsuperscript{311} One of the few prominent Western Kurdologists, Thomas Bois voiced rather than the political aspects of Kurdish society, 'the soul [and] the character' of the Kurdish people. Bois defined Kurdistan as the 'Poland of the Middle East,' a land which has been 'shared between Turkey where 3.800.000 Kurds live, Iran where they make up to 3 millions, and Iraq which accommodates up to 1 million.' Those who live in Syria, Bois continued, 'are divided in the north of Aleppo and Upper Jazira. Finally, Russia has 160.000 Kurds in the Soviet Republic of Azerbeidjan.' (my translation from French). Cf. Bois, Thomas. \textit{L'âme des Kurdes à la lumière de leur folklore}. Beirut: Les Cahiers de l'Est N° 5 and 6, 1946. p.5.

Basile Nikitine covered many aspects of Kurdish life including its history, socio-economic organisation and culture in light of what he referred to as “national spirit” that he firmly believed every people possesses. 'The name of Kurdistan' Nikitine stated, 'that is to say, [the name] of the country of the Kurds, is not that of an independent state defined by its political boundaries within which otherwise lives a population quite homogeneous; the majority of them have at least the same ethnic origin.' (my translation from French) Cf. Basile, Nikitine. \textit{Les Kurdes: étude sociologique et historique}. Paris: Aujourd'hui, 1975. p.23

\textsuperscript{312} The Treaty of Lausanne ended the conflict due to the partitioning of the Ottoman empire in 1923. The treaty is also known to have made no specific mention of the Kurds nor of their rights in the modern Turkish state, the borders of which it mostly defined.

\textsuperscript{313} As far as the Kurds in Iran were concerned, Abbas Vali stated that the Irano-Kurdish frontiers had been set up a long time ago (namely before 1514) and that this territory had since then been controlled by successive Iranian regimes: '[i]n 1514 the newly founded Safavid state lost the greater part of its Kurdish territory to its powerful neighbour, the Ottoman state, and this division, which was ratified in the Zahab Treaty of 1639, remained in force until the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.' Source:. Vali, Abbas. “The Kurds and Their 'Others': Fragmented Identity and Fragmented Politics.” In \textit{The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics}, edited by Abd, Al-Jabbār Fāliḥ, and Hosham Dawod. London: Saqi, 2006. p.70-71

\textsuperscript{314} Bozarslan, Hamit. “Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey: From Tacit Contract to Rebellion.” In \textit{Essays on the
for maintaining Turkish national sovereignty and in the later years, reinforcing it. With the establishment of the Turkish constitution in 1924, the Kurds lost their legal status and this predicament was compounded by the continual denial of their physical existence.

A cursory glance at the other countries with a substantial Kurdish presence reveals that despite the fact that there has not been a denial of Kurdish “reality” like in the Turkish case, the situation was not fundamentally different. In the 1960s, an arbitrary census in Syria, for instance, deprived nearly a quarter of the Kurdish population, which constituted the largest non-Arab minority, of citizenship and denied them the right to own property, marry legally or pursue higher education. This arbitrary law resulted in the routine harassment of the younger Kurdish generations, including policies of discriminatory access to many aspects of civic life. It can be argued, therefore, that the case of the Syrian-born Kurds represents a paradigm of “complete statelessness.” In Syria, the majority of Kurds have not been granted citizenship, let alone the right to self-determination, whereas the normative practice in other states with a significant Kurdish population has been to endow this minority with the nationality-status of the dominant group.

In the wake of the Syrian uprising which began in March 2011, Kurds were granted those cultural and local administrative rights that they had long been denied. However, since the uprising in Syria has descended into full-scale regional war, and where the Kurds have been under heavy nationalist pressure from both the Syrian regime and the Arab opposition,

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In this respect, Human Rights Watch issued a report to publicize the “qayd ajanib”—literally status of foreigner—which Syrian Kurds were long entitled to in the country of their birth. See: Syria: The Silenced Kurds, 1996.
Kurdish parties claimed that they presently struggle to reach a general peaceful democratic consensus despite the external pressures from regional powers, including Turkey. Indeed, some political analysts have argued that the political games made by the Kurds in Northern Syria (or in the de facto Kurdish cantons of Northern Syria) were determining factors of the İmralı peace process, launched between Turkish authorities and the PKK back in March 2013. The peace process is later believed to have collapsed because of Turkey's alleged support to Islamic State militants who have been involved in a deadly fight against Syrian Kurdish civilians as well as military groups since 2014.

In Iraq, the Kurds frequently suffered oppression at the hands of the Baathist regime. Although their political and legal status changed dramatically after the allied invasion of Iraq in 2003, when the Iraqi Kurds were granted further autonomy, the potential for Kurdish self-governance has remained ambiguous. It is interesting to note that, especially regarding the contentious question of negotiating oil contracts and even the deep political stalemate that followed the prosecution of the fugitive Iraqi Vice-President, the Kurdish authorities stood up against the Iraqi central authority.

As opposition between the Shia-led government and the former Sunni masters of Iraq deepened, proponents of Kurdish self-governance asserted that the Kurdish opposition should benefit from this situation, as it represented a significant window of opportunity for reinforcement of the autonomous Kurdish identity. While, on the one hand, the ethno-sectarian fault-lines there hardened to a certain extent, Iraq witnessed other politically significant developments that emerged in 2011, in the spirit of the Arab spring. In a move that was inspired by uprisings that swept across the Middle East, thousands of Kurdish demonstrators in Sulaymaniyah and several other cities inside Kurdistan region, publicly expressed discontent with their own autonomous government, and asked for more secure jobs and services. The Iraqi Kurdish extension of the regional upheaval thus brought new

perspectives to the political scene. When the Islamic State attacked Northern Iraq in 2014, the Iraqi Kurdish forces were able to capture Kirkuk, widely seen as “Kurdish Jerusalem.” Since then, the debate over Iraqi Kurdistan's independence has been ongoing, and the president of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Mesûd Barzânî, has uttered several times that a referendum will soon take place for that purpose.

In Iran, Shia Islam remains the backbone of Iranian social and political life. With the sole exception of the establishment of the Republic of Mahabad in Iranian Kurdistan in 1946 which lasted for little over a year, the Irano-Kurdish commitment to autonomy has suffered a plethora of setbacks throughout history, and the necessary prerequisites to afford the Kurds greater control over their own community have not been realized. Although Kurdish and Iranian peoples have historically shared many common characteristics such as the origins of language and traditions, the situation in Iran has been significantly less than a paragon of harmonious co-existence. The Kurds in Iran have traditionally been considered a sub-category of Persian culture and have been persistently denied greater control over their own community. The scholar, Basile Nikitine, who served as a Russian consul in Iranian Kurdistan in the first half of the twentieth century, of the essence of eternal antagonisms between the two people writes,

"[t]his is perhaps one of the greatest tragedies of Kurdish history that the Persian and Kurdish people, who belong to the same race, profess the same general faith and enjoy the same social and cultural heritage, have not been able to fill in this sectarian gap of insignificant differences that separates them."

With Kurdish populations inhabiting regions in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, it is unsurprising that the Kurdish question “naturally” involved at least four different historical and distinct national realities, not to mention the engagement of Western or other external

powers either to solve or prolong the deadlock in the Kurdish national problem at various
different stages in history. Even though methods of oppression or assimilation policies
toward the Kurds varied from state to state, both implicit and indeed explicit forms of
Kurdish repudiation have remained a salient and recurrent feature, and it often resulted in
the ban of language, cultural and political activities, and more generally any manifestations
of Kurdish identity and self-determination. Thus, one might conclude that the Iranian,
Turkish, Iraqi and Syrian regimes, despite their fundamental ideological differences with
regards to state-formation and maintenance, were in agreement on one point: the refusal of
the Kurdish national identity.\textsuperscript{330}

\textsuperscript{330} For a thorough analysis, refer to: Bozarslan, Hamit. \textit{Conflit kurde: le brasier oublié du Moyen-orient}.
Kurdish national consciousness

Early authors having dealt with the Kurds and Kurdish nationalism have laid the grounds for an historical analysis and understanding of the Kurdish nationalist thinking. Their writings have not fully examined theories on nations and nationalism in general, however, based on their experience in the region, and as Orientalists with privileged access to wide history archives and other sources, these authors have been persuaded that the Kurds constitute a single nation historically. To substantiate this argument, they have most commonly referred to early Kurdish poetry and literature. They have defined the Kurds as a people who identify themselves as Kurds and who have inhabited their present land for many hundreds of years, having a specific language and culture of their own.

Thus, in the early pieces regarding the Kurds, almost all of the key components defining an ethnie (or a would-be nation) which have later been theorized by Antony Smith can already be found: 'a collective name, a common myth of descents, a shared history, common culture, a link with a homeland, and a sense of solidarity.' This thesis is supported by the Kurdish intellectual Ismet Chérif Vanly, one of the few to make a valuable contribution to the history of his own people.

'Kurdish culture is, in its widest sense and with its various components, the basis of an old and strong cultural self-consciousness from which the Kurds define themselves as a distinct community. This is a notion which has been transmitted across generations. The Kurds have from old times also been considered a distinct people by neighbouring peoples.'

As for the anthropological work on the Kurds, it was not content with solely traditional orientalist affirmations that the Kurds were a unified historic entity, and took on a more

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nuanced path. Through closer examination of the tribal or religious kinship systems that existed among the Kurds, scholars have been able to demonstrate that there were significant differences in cultural, religious and/or linguistic practices of many Kurds as a people. In this regard, Martin van Bruinessen conducted extensive anthropological fieldwork in Kurdistan and was able to confirm through his analysis of the concept, *Kurdishness*, that ethnicity is a fluid, dynamic and non-static concept. *Kurdishness*, in van Bruinessen's view, presented an overlapping set of identities: the Kurds could be religiously Sunni, Alevi, or Yezidi; linguistically of Kurmanji, Sorani or Zaza speech; and could pay loyalties to different tribes. Indeed, van Bruinessen's examination of Kurdish ethnicity leads to the confirmation of a general theory on ethnicities, in which he has underlined their fluidity and changeable character against primordial conceptions of ethnicity and (national) identities, which present them as rather fixed and singular entities.

Both orientalist and anthropological works have enriched the literature on Kurdish history and culture. Thanks to these studies, we have been able to better grasp the inner dynamics of the Kurdish people. On one hand, they cannot be fully assimilated into surrounding cultures, and they refuse to be mistaken with these. On the other, they are composed of several different inner groups, who stick to their distinct juxtaposing identities, maintaining different cultural, religious, and/or linguistic practices. Whether written in the orientalist tradition or from an anthropological standpoint, early works on the Kurds agree that, although religious and cultural practices differ greatly from North to South, the Kurds have lived in the territories in which they live for many long years.

This alone suffices to defy modernist conceptions of nationalism and the rise of nations.

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according to which the sense of national collectivity is mainly a product of industrialization and modern imagination.\textsuperscript{343} In the Kurdish case, however, the collective sense seems to have resulted from the fact that the majority of Kurds never left their homeland. As indicated by Vanly, there are

\begin{quote}
'two basic factors in the making of the Kurdish culture and consciousness. One is geographical which includes the land of Kurdistan, its nature and resources and its surroundings. The other is the human factor which relates to the ancestors of the Kurds (…) The land is of vital importance for the Kurds; not only by virtue of being their homeland, but also as it largely determines their way of life.'\textsuperscript{344}
\end{quote}

That said, I do not suggest that modernist conceptions of nations and nationalism are irrelevant in the study of Kurdish movements. Modernist conceptions certainly offer a general reference to analyze the link between industrialization and the aspiration for nation-statehood, and most importantly, its repercussions on peoples such as the Kurds, who did not enter the age of industrialization on an equal foot with more developed nations. Both historical and anthropological reading of the Kurdish historical narrative would suggest that a significant sense of collective identity has existed among the Kurds for many hundreds of years.\textsuperscript{345} This “sense” of collective identity has experienced a tangible development into a distinct form of nationalistic struggle in modern times. It is important to note, however, that this nationalistic struggle, historically, has not been articulated in terms of a Kurdish nationalism in the Western sense of the term because Kurds have traditionally, and particularly during the Ottoman era, viewed an Islamic supra-nationalistic identity an important element in their collective identity, embracing alternative articulations of sub-nationalistic ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{346}

Within the Ottoman empire, the Kurds were able to achieve a certain degree of autonomy in

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\textsuperscript{343} Halliday, Fred. “Can We Write a Modernist History of Kurdish Nationalism?” 2006.
\textsuperscript{344} Vanly, “A Divided Nation,” 2005.
\textsuperscript{345} Olson, Robert. “The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Foreign Policy Toward Syria, Iran, Russia and Iraq since the Gulf War.” In \textit{The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s}, edited by Robert Olson, 84-113. Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1996.
\textsuperscript{346} Ottomans famously synthesized elements of the cultural heritage of numerous civilizations including the ancient peoples of Mesopotamia. They legitimized their rule over a mosaic of twenty \textit{millets} or more by representing themselves as new “protectors” of this overwhelming ethnic diversity and cultural richness. While they considered themselves Islamic Caliphs, and legitimized their rule with a distinctly Islamic discourse, the Ottoman Sultans did not attempt the impossible task of putting all of these “nationalities” into one box in terms of their ethnic and religious identities.
\end{flushright}
those regions of the empire that were considered Kurdish, and in these regions, Kurds were able to establish 'Kurdish governments,' 'independent sanjaks' or 'dependent sanjaks.'\(^{347}\) While these regions were still officially under Ottoman control, Kurdish local governors, generally referred to as mîr managed, cultivated, and benefited from the lands under their authority.\(^{348}\) Overall, the Ottoman era has proved to be a time when the Kurds were willing to embrace a supra-ethnic Ottoman identity as long as public expressions of their own ethnicity were tolerated and their rights as an ethnie were protected from brutality and corruption.\(^{349}\) The thus deeply embedded historical experience and consciousness of Kurdish collective identity was not fully compatible with the emerging Turkish concept of nationality at the turn of the twentieth century, and even less so with Western concepts of nationality; furthermore, because this Kurdish consciousness was so diverse, encompassing atavistic but variegated religious and ethnic traditional forms, it was equally not fully conceptualizable.

Many historians and analysts, including those of Kurdish origin, have emphasized that the Kurds, since the Ottoman times, have been 'notoriously divided (...) politically, linguistically, tribally, and ideologically'\(^{350}\) and it is for this reason that a Kurdish nation-state has never been brought to fruition. It is worth pointing out, however, that these historical divisions within the Kurdish collectivity did not become a “problem” until in the aftermath of the creation of nation-states in the Middle East. In this regard, Ignatieff's impressions whilst crossing the borders of Iraq and Turkey are worth replicating:

'[t]he mystique of nations is to appear eternal, to seem like elemental features of the landscape itself. Yet the borders of a nation lay the mystique bare. There, you realize how unnatural, arbitrary and even absurd the division of the world into nations actually is. (...) What frock-coated gentleman in Sèvres or Lausanne decided that this side would be Turkey, and that side Iraq? The same people – the Kurds – live


\(^{350}\) Gunter, The A to Z of the Kurds, Introduction XXIX.
It was only after the division of the region referred to as the Middle East into arbitrary “nation-states” that the political, linguistic, religious and tribal divisions or differences latent in the Kurdish collectivity became decisive, leading to the political and national disunity that has characterized the Kurdish community over the course of the last century. Whereas Turkey succeeded in uniting a country on the basis of its people's linguistic, cultural and historical commonalities, embracing a Western, or more specifically French form of citizenry and nationhood, the Kurds internally remained fragmented and were allocated into different nation-states and usually were forced to assimilate into these entities.

However, while historically the Kurds have been restricted in their pursuit of temporal power, this has not prevented them from engaging in significant nationalist projects. The rise of the Arab and Turkish nationalisms and more particularly Kemalism, which replaced the Ottoman identity in the first half of the twentieth century, prevented many Kurds, who have never constituted a state's numerical majority, from full assimilation but also from achieving minority status in the countries in which they have always lived. Thus the Kurds entered the 'age of nationalism' on the back foot but were forced to compensate for this temporal deficiency or disadvantage by waging periodic insurrections against the Turkish, Iraqi and Iranian authorities.

In the process and as a direct result of this increased politico-nationalist activity, the “Kurdish nation” gradually emerged as a referent object of nationalism, resisting assimilation into the Turkish, Arab and Iranian nationalist projects, defying Gellner's declaration, '[m]ost cultures and potential national groups (...) go meekly to their doom, to see their culture (...) slowly disappear, dissolving into the wider culture of some new...
Despite these significant advances in the development of a Kurdish national consciousness, in practice, the mobilization of a collective Kurdish identity has not translated into meaningful steps towards a universalized Kurdish affiliation.

With an increasing focus on concepts centered on nationalism and practices of nation-states, variegated Kurdish movements have sought to overcome such difficulties related to what one might refer to from a modernist perspective, “low nationalistic” political roots and have endeavored to give rise to a modern Kurdish nationalistic, and later nationalistic-secular, political agenda. The situation of the Turks (who succeeded to form a nation-state) and the Kurds (who did not) can also be better explained by Gellner's theory of effective versus potential nationalisms.

According to this theory, effective nationalism encompasses those states in which a specific culture is endowed with its own successful political system in place, given that nationalism is 'the convergence of political and cultural units.' Nonetheless, Gellner draws attention to a striking point regarding nationalism, and the weakness that derives from its cultural elements. If language is what can be seen to form the cultural unity of a nation then given the huge numbers of different languages that exist even within discrete polities, this only reinforces Gellner's second concept of “potential nationalism.” Potential nationalism takes on significant relevance in the Kurdish case, as the Kurds have not attained a legitimate nation-state but have historically striven in that direction.

In the process of the demise of the Ottoman empire and in the aftermath of its dissolution, first Arab nationalists, and then their Turkish counterparts, adopted a type of nationalism which was based on the assumption that they represented a culturally, linguistically and/or racially homogenized people. One of the instigators of pan-Turkism at the turn of the

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356 Gellner, Nation and Nationalism, 47.
357 Gellner, Nation and Nationalism, 44-45.
358 Gellner, Nation and Nationalism, 43.
359 Murat Somer marks a difference between Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms which developed in dissimilar ways, according to which Turkish nationalism would be based on the idea of putting all the diversities remnant of the Ottoman empire into one box, whereas Kurdish nationalism would be rooted in its particularism. The idea that the Kurds form a distinct nation is justified by their cultural differences vis à vis the neighboring Turk, Arab and Iranian communities. For a more detailed analysis, see: Somer, Murat. “Defensive and Liberal Nationalisms: The Kurdish Question and Modernization/Democratization.” In
twentieth century, Yusuf Akçura, believed that neither Ottomanism nor pan-Islamism could save the Ottoman empire from collapsing, but only pan-Turkism.\textsuperscript{360} He considered it as the foundation of a "Turkish political nationality based on race."\textsuperscript{361} Conversely, Arab nationalism seemed to grow out of an historic rivalry between the Arabs and their Ottoman Turk rulers\textsuperscript{362} gaining ground when pan-Arabists theorized that the Arabs, speaking the holy language of Islam, should be considered a nation apart.\textsuperscript{363} The Arabs decided to put an end to the domination by the Ottomans and create a "better" order in which Arabs, and not Ottoman Turks, ruled Arabs.\textsuperscript{364} Although the latter did not achieve the creation of a single Arab state comprised of all the geographic zones where Arabic was spoken, the region witnessed the formation of several Arab nation-states, nourished with pan-Arabist ideals and sentiments, and at the least, having the word Arab in their countries' names.\textsuperscript{365}

Emerging Turkish nationalism by the time of the dissolution of the Ottoman empire was perhaps a response to such growing Arab nationalism, and potential Kurdish nationalism, which was yet to rise, as well as, it can be argued, a way of securing control over other peoples of the former Ottoman empire. It follows that nationalism is a geographically-contagious political phenomenon. Arab and Turkish brands of nationalism were initially inspired by the ideas of Enlightenment intellectuals and strict German conceptions of nationalism, and did not resonate with Renan's liberal conception of a nation. Both Turkish nationalism, in the name of pan-Turkism (and later Kemalism), as well as pan-Arabism, undermined cultural diversities of the places and people they dominated, proclaiming the need for a single homogenized and nationalistic state.\textsuperscript{366} The shift toward homogenized articulations of nationalism brought so little to the people in the Middle East in terms of democratic governance and free expression of diversity that, in the eyes of Kedourie, these

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{360} Georgeon, \textit{Aux origines du nationalisme turc}, 24.
\item \textsuperscript{361} Idem.
\item \textsuperscript{362} Mardin, Şerif, “Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes.” \textit{Turkish Studies}, 6 (2005): 145-165. URL: \url{https://ondercetin.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/turkish-islamic-exceptionalism.pdf} p.148
\item \textsuperscript{365} Dawisha, \textit{Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century}. 2003.
\item \textsuperscript{366} Salameh, “The Arab Westphalia,” 2011.
\end{itemize}
had to be profoundly criticized and by all means replaced by other forms of political principles which were more tolerant and appropriate.

After the First World War, the victorious powers, in a very concrete and decisive manner, intervened in the construction of today's Near and Middle Eastern nation-states. The Kurds in this region, in order to protect their cultural and territorial rights as a means of ensuring at least partial independence, established several political organizations. A key organization among them was the Kurdistan Taâli ve Terakki Cemiyeti (The Society for the Rise and Progress of Kurdistan, hereafter called KTTC), founded in 1918, in Istanbul.\(^{367}\)

The catalyst for its foundation was the gradual disintegration of the Ottoman empire and its millet system. Given that the founders of the KTTC were mostly Kurdish notables and members of the Kurdish landowning class, they had long identified themselves with their distinct Kurdish ethnicity and the lands they had owned in their regions. However, with the commencement of the dissolution of the Ottoman empire and the rise of pan-Turkism, it had now become problematic for them to maintain both their identity and their ownership of land.

The KTTC was managed by a board of representatives consisting of intellectuals and members of the Kurdish elite. Its aim was stated to advance Kurdistan materially and spiritually by acting in the interests of the Kurdish nation with a focus on Islamic education, thoughts and spirituality.\(^{368}\) In practice, the purpose was to keep the Kurdish community united around a strong common Islamic sentiment, in which otherwise feudalism, tribalism and other forms of highly complex traditional structures usually would have coexisted albeit in conflict. Yet, because of the explicit emphasis they made on Kurdishness, their political activities may also be viewed to have promoted an early Kurdish nationalism even if it was far from turning into a fully-fledged political doctrine at the time.\(^{369}\)


\(^{368}\) Beşikçi, Ismail. Kurdistan Üzerine Emperiyalist Bölüşüm Mücadelesi, 171.

Drawing on archival research, Rohat Alakom stated that a modern Kurdish nationalism was able to develop in Istanbul between 1900 and 1925.\textsuperscript{370} First, we witnessed the birth of an elite class whose members promoted Kurdish language, rights,\textsuperscript{371} and interests; in brief, a Kurdish way of life.\textsuperscript{372} Second, 'more than a dozen of Kurdish associations came into existence during those years, known as cultural associations.'\textsuperscript{373} Third, Kurdish press houses were established for publications in Ottoman and Kurdish languages.\textsuperscript{374} Thus, Anderson's logic to connect print-literacy and bilingualism with the conveying of nationalism can perfectly be applied in the early context of Kurdish nationalism.\textsuperscript{375} As Alakom makes it further clear, these developments have determined the theoretical contours of Kurdish nationalism, which helped 'facilitate the spread of Kurdish national sentiments and knowledge on Kurdish language and history among masses.'\textsuperscript{376}

That said, according to the political scientist Paul White,

'[t]he KTTC was really a small, elite grouping of urban Kurdish aristocrats, devoid of any real contact with the common people whose interests it claimed to represent in Turkish Kurdistan. (...) Kurdish laborers, who lived in the same quarters of Istanbul as these Kurdish notables, had nothing to do with the KTTC(...).'\textsuperscript{377}

White's views on the elitist character of the Kurdish notables have been confirmed by Mehmet Emin Bozarslan, Kurdish writer and linguist, who further criticized that his compatriots within the KTTC were not able to agree upon as to how Kurdish independence should be modeled. In Bozarslan's analysis, the Kurdish independence agenda at the beginning of the twentieth century was indeed reduced to trivial power games with the Allied states, namely the British,\textsuperscript{378} and that while the most prominent Kurdish leaders and intellectuals were divorced from their people's real needs and wants at the ground level,

\textsuperscript{371} Haydarizade Davut Efendi, responsible for legal affairs within the KTTC offers free legal assistance to those Kurds who are in need of it. Alakom, \textit{Eski Istanbul Kürtleri}, 69.
\textsuperscript{372} Alakom, \textit{Eski Istanbul Kürtleri}, 66.
\textsuperscript{373} These associations are usually closed down by the government for reasons of separatism. To consult the entire list of Kurdish organizations and their stated objectives: Alakom, \textit{Eski Istanbul Kürtleri}, 95-104.
\textsuperscript{374} Alakom, \textit{Eski Istanbul Kürtleri}, 104.
\textsuperscript{375} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, 116.
\textsuperscript{376} Alakom, \textit{Eski Istanbul Kürtleri}, 105.
however, Ataturk, on the other hand, was politically active, meeting and exchanging with local Kurdish representatives in Kurdish areas. Ataturk was thus able to organize Erzurum and Sivas Congresses and strengthen himself as a leader both politically and militarily, for both the Turks and the Kurds.\textsuperscript{379} From Bozarslan's perspective, the KTTC in spite of its objectives to achieve self-determination in the name of the Kurdish people, in reality, left the Kurdish political field open to the overtures of Ataturk.\textsuperscript{380}


Transient recognition of the Kurds: the first stage of Kemalism

Although the Turkish regime, in its earliest incarnation in the 1920s, promised the Kurds the realization of those nationalist aspirations that had surfaced in the Ottoman period in peace with their Turkish brothers, the regime undermined its promises with ruthless repression of cultural and political autonomy, confirming Kedourie's declaration that '[t]he national state claims to treat all citizens as equal members of the nation, but this fair-sounding principle only serves to disguise the tyranny of one group over another.'

In its later incarnations, particularly in the last quarter of the twentieth century, Kemalism gave rise to extreme state repression, stoking mass and military violence against Kurdish nationalist or semi-nationalist movements as well as those supporting them. According to Hamit Bozarslan, the Kemalist regime in its formative years underwent three different stages, each animated with different dynamics and objectives as well as external enemies, and when these external enemies were absent then internal enemies replaced them as principal targets of the Kemalist revolution.

Bozarslan argued that the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1922) characterized the first stage of Kemalism. During this period it was the colonial imperialist powers such as the British and the French along with non-Muslim populations of the Ottoman empire which constituted “the external enemy” to the emerging Kemalist regime. Turkey's Ottoman and Muslim past was yet to be denied because at the time it was serving as a weapon against “imperialist backed” non-Muslim elements present on Turkish soil. Kurdish intellectual Serhat Bucak argues that the Caliphate was the common ground between the Turks and the Kurds during the Turkish War of Independence, and Ataturk was above all a pragmatic leader, who concealed his intentions to create a republic after the war. The Kurds were called to unify under the Islamic banner against the “infidels,” though they were later to be

381 Kedourie, Nationalism, 127.
considered an “internal enemy” themselves.

In such an atmosphere, an important international treaty was signed granting ephemeral recognition to the Kurds. It was the Treaty of Sèvres which gave the Kurds the opportunity to pursue the possibility of the right to self-determination, which would have brought them closer to statehood, but was never realized. Signed on August 10, 1920 by the defeated Ottoman government and the principal Allied powers (excluding Russia and the United States), the Treaty of Sèvres has become one of two international treaties, significant for understanding the rise and repression of Kurdish ethnic and nationalist aspirations in early post-Ottoman Turkey. Article 62 of the treaty had indicated:

'a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia, as defined in Article 27, II (2) and (3).'

Despite the provisions in section number II of the Treaty of Sèvres, which in a way helped solidify the geographical division of Kurdistan between the North and South, it had nevertheless clearly recognized the legitimacy of the existence of the Kurds as a people or nation with a territory in today's East and Southeast Turkey. However, as pointed out earlier, this Treaty was never implemented, largely because it was denounced by the new masters of Turkey, that is, the Kemalists, as being too harsh on Turkey due to its significant other provisions 'for an independent Armenia (...) and for a Greek presence in Eastern Thrace and on the Anatolian West coast, as well as Greek control over the Aegean islands commanding the Dardanelles.' In Öktem's words, this first stage of Kemalism ultimately turned out to be a remarkable victory of 'an initially clandestine [Kemalist] nationalist movement' who had won the Turkish national liberation war against 'the Greek armies in

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389 Öktem employs the term “clandestine” because of the French and British occupation of the Ottoman capital by 1920, which had put the Sultan under official Allied control.

The Treaty of Sèvres was finally completely annulled in the aftermath of the overthrow of the Ottoman sultan in the course of the Turkish War of Independence won by the Turkish nationalists. Therefore, despite the fact that the Treaty of Sèvres was concluded with the recognition of the Kurds as a people, it took place in an unfavorable atmosphere of missed opportunities for them.

In retrospect, the timing of the Treaty of Sèvres was perhaps premature for the realization of a Kurdish homeland, resulting in a lost opportunity to advance the argument for self-determination. At this epoch, the Kurds had long been used to living within the Ottoman empire and were probably unprepared to exercise such rights had they ever been implemented in the immediate aftermath of the Ottoman empire. The Caliphate was much more important for the religiously-minded Kurds as opposed to non-Islamic groups, previously subsumed within the Ottoman empire. From this perspective, it could be argued that Islam played a negative role in the preparation of the Kurds for statehood, a critique which was later voiced by secular and left-wing Kurdish movements in the last quarter of the twentieth century in Turkey.\footnote{For several references, see: *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, edited by Abbas Vali, Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 2003.}

Even more notable, the Kurds maintained a tribal structure with internal rivalries and conflicts, which was also an impediment to the formation of a national movement.\footnote{Van Bruinessen, Martin. *Agha, Shaikh and State*. Istanbul: İletişim, 2006.}

David McDowall best conveyed the ambiguities of the post Treaty of Sèvres from a non-Kurdish perspective, arguing that not only ordinary Kurds but also their tribal and religious leaders still had an umbilical link to the old Islamic order. Therefore, we can theorize that Kurdish nationalist beginnings owed patriotism to Islam and the tribal structures the Kurds shared ancestral origins with. In these circumstances, they did not quite know what to expect from the provisions the Treaty of Sèvres had made for them, and they ultimately feared an unknown situation that could potentially bring further disaster.\footnote{McDowall, David. “The Kurdish Question: A Historical Review.” In *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, edited by Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, 10-33. London: Routledge, 1992.}
With regards to the Turkish rejection of Kurdish self-determination which followed the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres in late 1920, it was ironically a dramatic reversal of the embracing of the Kurds under the auspice of Ataturk. Particularly noteworthy is that Ataturk and his colleagues had initially insisted on preserving all subjects of the Ottoman empire with a clear emphasis on protecting the Kurds and the Kurdish-inhabited provinces. Erzurum and Sivas Congresses, while shaping the Turkish War of Independence had sown the seeds of a Turkish-Kurdish alliance and are perhaps at the base of a popular Kurdish saying to this day: The Turks and the Kurds stood shoulder to shoulder in the War of Independence.

Indeed, referring to Kurdish-Turkish unity, very explicit in early Kemalist utterance and actions, Ataturk had promised the Kurds that they would fully exercise their rights as soon as “foreign occupation and interference” had ended. However, after the Kurds had helped the Turks to defeat the foreign occupation, the new Turkish government turned on the Kurds, tearing up their promises. In this regard, Beşikçi offered further insight in a letter addressed to UNESCO in 1981. Beşikçi stated that during the Turkish independence war the Kemalists exploited the friction between Muslim Kurds and Christian Armenians. Kemalists persuaded the Kurds about the importance of a common struggle under the banner of Islam against “infidel” outsiders, who wanted to turn Kurdistan into a part of Armenia.

Wadie Jwaideh stressed that the Turkish officials had done much to cherish Kurdish nationalist aspirations during the dismantling of the Ottoman empire, as far as 'encourag[ing] the Kurds to demand the creation of an independent state of their own in eastern Asia Minor.' The compelling reason for this was to avoid the risk of losing the Eastern provinces to the Armenians. But 'then came the miraculous Turkish revival under Mustafa Kemal,' when it came to legislating Kurdish demands, 'the Turks first

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397 Jwaideh, The Kurdish National Movement, 204.
discouraged and later proscribed Kurdish nationalism.398

Almost a century later, the Sèvres experience remains quite alive in both Turkish and Kurdish nationalist circles.399 As Philip Robins put it, 'the diplomatic lesson drawn [by the Turkish officials] (...) is that the creation of a Kurdish state will inevitably weaken the Turkish state. [And t]he practical lesson has been that only through self-reliance and the resort to arms can such an eventuality be prevented.'400 Whereas the Kurds view the Treaty of Sèvres as a turning point in their modern history as they lost out on the opportunity for national self-determination.401

Final recognition of the Turkish state: the second stage of Kemalism

As for the second stage of Kemalism, the period 1922-1930, during which two major Kurdish revolts took place in response to the domination of centralist Kemalist nationalism, Bozarslan qualifies it as an evident *Janus-like* Kemalism.\(^{402}\) It is when Turkish nationalism became the foundation upon the idea of which Kemalism had to build a modern civilized nation according to a Western model as it was the only conceivable horizon that could emerge out of the ruins of the Ottoman empire: '\[t\]he Kemalist government was strong enough to imagine itself as a truly revolutionary regime, without any direct and organic link with (...) any previous experience encountered in any age of Ottoman history.'\(^{403}\)

During this period, as a result of the remarkably successful managing of the Turkish War of Independence by the Kemalist regime previously, the imperial powers had ceased to be viewed as the “external enemy” which is why the Turkish republic started to focus on the “internal enemies:” the Kurds, Atatürk's opponents,\(^{404}\) and anyone that was related to *irtica* – a term used to refer to the “religion reaction” as a threat to the Turkish republic and the nation. It was during this second period of Kemalism, that Turkey began its *Turkification*\(^{405}\) of non-Turkish elements within the boundaries of the modern Turkish state, defined by the Treaty of Lausanne, signed on July 24, 1923 in Lausanne.\(^{406}\)

The Treaty of Lausanne reinforced Turkey’s lasting recognition as a state and played a central role in confirming the early Turkish republic's repudiation of ethnic minorities, defining Turkey as a state extending from the Aegean Sea to the Persian frontier without


\(^{405}\) I borrow this term from Pervin Erbil. She defines *Turkification* to be a period in which Turkishness is forged from other ethnicities or by getting rid of them. According to her, this was the most efficient method that was adopted at the turn of the twentieth century to create a homogeneous nation-state. Source: Erbil, Pervin. “Nüfus ve Iskan Politikaları,” [Population and Settlement Policy] In *Resmi Tarih Tartışmalari 3: Ittihatçılık'tan Kemalizme*, [From Unionism to Kemalism] edited by Fikret Başkaya and Sait Çetinoğlu: 277-296. Ankara: Maki, 2007. p.277-278.

any reference to the Kurdish population. Provisions in the Treaty of Lausanne relating to minorities in Turkey made no specific mention of the Kurds and referred solely to the presence of non-Muslim communities. Article 40 indicated that,

'Turkish nationals belonging to non-Moslem minorities (...) shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institutions, any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein.'

On the surface, the Lausanne Treaty appeared to protect ethnic minorities in the region. In this regard, US president Wilson in his Plan for world's peace had declared that '[non Turkish] nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development.' However, (imperial) power politics on the ground invalidated the entire logic of the Lausanne Treaty, at least as interpreted by Wilson. Thereafter,

'Britain, eager to control the oil of Mosul, took from Turkey this overwhelmingly Kurdish vilayet and made it a part of Iraq where [Britain] had been given a mandate. France incorporated three Kurdish-populated areas into Syria as the mandate power there. The division of the people was complete.'

From that moment, the Kurds were a nation without a state. From the current Kurdish perspective, the division of the Kurdish provinces, formerly part of the Ottoman empire, into Turkey and the new British and French mandated states of Iraq and Syria, is referred to as a milestone in the history of Kurdistan during and in the aftermath of World War I, between 1915-1925. Kurdish identity had been at that moment de facto subsumed vis à vis the Turkish republic, which was henceforth officially based on a nation-state model in which case both the state and the nation were Turkish.

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Also, van Bruinessen pointed out that although in Turkey non-Moslem minorities are officially not discriminated against and that international treaties signed by Turkey protect their rights, ‘[i]n actual practice, however, the situation is rather different. A distinct anti-Armenian feeling pervades the military and the bureaucracy, and other Christian communities suffer by association.’ Source: Van Bruinessen, Martin. “Kurdish society, ethnicity, nationalism and refugee problems,” 62.


409 Idem. (My translation from French)

410 As far as the Kurds in Iran are concerned, they had been long ago separated from the rest of the Kurdish provinces in the 16th century when the Ottomans and the Safavid Empire basically set their borders.


412 Baskın Oran formulated this as a ‘monist state of mind.’ He argued that, as opposed to the British for example, the Turks considered Turkishness as a supra-identity in Turkey. Source: Oran, Baskın. “The
This second stage of formative Kemalism is also examined by contemporary conservative observers such as the political scientists Samuel Huntington and Michel Gurfinkiel. They posit that Atatürk, by rejecting the idea of a multinational empire and by attempting to strip his people of their Ottoman and/or Islamic past 'had launched a massive effort both to Westernize [Turkish society] and to modernize it.' Kemalists sincerely believed that this endeavor was worth the extensive efforts made and that both modernization and Westernization was achievable; what is more, these processes could only be successfully achieved within the framework of a Western nation-state. Thus, it was the Kemalist Turkish republic which attempted to bring to fruition radical Westernizing reforms by abolishing 'the institution of the Caliphate (March 3, 1924)' which was followed by the prohibition of religious mystic orders (November 30, 1925), 'the adoption of the Latin alphabet (November 1928), 'the abrogation of Islam as the state's religion (1928) and the termination of all kinds of traditional education (via madrassas).'

It is worth pointing out that the nuances of the Kemalist concept of secularism became obvious when compared to Western interpretations of this concept, which saw it as simply the separation of church and state in which religion would be subjugated to state bureaucracy. In the Turkish secularist case, a negative normative value was placed on religion which was deemed as an obstacle to progress during the process of modernization of both (Turkish) state and society.

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416 It would take Turkish political structures almost three decades to alter this strict Kemalist vision of secularism and for it to evolve into an ideology where religion was not necessarily incompatible with the modern development of the country when this country's historical dynamics were taken into account. The triumph of the famous Democrat Party, with its religious tendencies and appeals to multi-ethnic identities in the 1950s illustrated that strict secularizing policies in their early Kemalist conceptualization were dysfunctional. For more on these dynamics: Toprak, Binnaz. “Civil Society in Turkey.” In *Civil Society in the Middle East*, edited by Augustus Richard Norton: 87-118. Leiden: Brill, 1996; Zürcher J. Erik. *Turkey: A Modern History*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2004. p.232-233
These transformations, revolutionary in nature, have been uniquely significant in the modern history of Turkey because of the diminishing Ottoman legacy and the role of religion in politics; Turkey for the first time explicitly accepted and implemented the Western model as the only choice for emulation in terms of modernization, greater technological improvement and achieving an equal footing among Western civilizations.\footnote{Kongar, Emre. \textit{Devrim Tarihi ve Toplumbilim açısından Atatürk.} [Ataturk from the perspectives of history of revolution and sociology] Istanbul: Remzi, 1983; Muller, Mark. “Nationalism and the Rule of Law in Turkey: The Elimination of Kurdish Representation during the 1990s.” In The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s, edited by Robert Olson: 173-199. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996. p.174} However, while these Westernizing reforms appeared to advance the existence of Turkey as a national state, they paradoxically laid the foundation to the elimination of multicultural identities on which, it may be argued, the very project of Western modernization was initially based. Redefining the national, political, religious and cultural identity of the Turkish people proceeded mainly in tandem with the prohibition and humiliation of the Kurdish language, elimination of all references to Kurdistan and replacement of Kurdish names for towns and children by more indigenously Turkish ones.\footnote{McDowall, \textit{A Modern History of the Kurds}, 191.; Vasilyeva, Gasratyan, Jigalina. \textit{Kürdistan Tarihi}, 213.} 

The triumph of the Turkish language as the official national language with the simultaneous suppression of the Kurdish language from regional traditional schools – the \textit{madressas} – a practice which was responsible for the termination of the primary source of Kurdish education,\footnote{McDowall, \textit{A Modern History of the Kurds}, 192.} further illustrated the achievement of Turkish national hegemony in the early years of Kemalism. These developments, Beşikçi argues, should be seen as part of Turkey's state history during which assimilation policies have been 'carefully thought of and systematically planned'\footnote{Beşikçi, Ismail. \textit{Ortadoğu’da Devlet Terörü} [State terror in the Middle East] Ankara: Yurt, 1991. p.124-125} as 'Turkish universities, Institutes of Turkology, institutions [promoting] Turkish history, language and literature increasingly endeavored to prove that Kurds were in fact Turks and that Kurdish is solely a dialect of the Turkish language.'\footnote{Idem.; Erbil, “Nüfus ve İskan Politikaları,” 287.}

The first Turkish constitution of the Republic in 1924 was written to fulfill these nationalist and assimilationist visions,\footnote{“The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey.” Accessed March 8, 2013. Available at: \url{www.anayasa.gov.tr}} and minorities were by law not allowed to claim existence on
Turkish territory as this was viewed as utterly destructive of Turkish national unity. Articles 1 to 3 defined some “unchangeable” elements of the constitution: the republic was committed to the 'values of Kemalist nationalism' and 'the language of the republic [was] Turkish.' These two constitutional revisions were reaffirmed by another important constitutional declaration that 'any person bound by nationality to the Turkish state is Turkish.' In practice, this led the Kurds to gradually comprehend that these constitutional provisions represented a consecration of the official eradication of their identity, and that whatever appeared to weaken Turkish national unity would immediately be suppressed by the Turkish state. The Kurds were soon to be categorized as “mountain Turks,” therefore, making their situation somewhat unique in the Turkish republican era.

'The battle for nationhood is a battle for hegemony' writes Michael Billig, 'by which a part claims to speak for the whole nation and to represent the national essence.' When “Ataturk's new nation” was created, it declared itself as ethnically homogenized and aimed for a solid institutionalization of the Turkish national state on that basis. This institutionalization of homogeneity has not been a peaceful process for many of those categories of people living in Turkey, often leading to decades of deep conflict and state-deployed violence. Turkey was certainly not a homogeneous nation, which did not contain sub-sections. While in the second stage of Kemalism a modern Turkish nation was envisioned, which was supposed to incorporate Western ideas of rights and tolerance regarding the minorities or other non-Turkish groups, distinct political mobilizations and expressions of these communities were taken as threats, leading to tragic consequences, particularly for the latter.

Though let us also bear in mind that such growing Kemalism was not just about creating a
society against non-Turkish groups. The majority of ordinary Turkish citizens throughout Anatolia experienced hardships as well, simply trying to apprehend the ideas brought about by this “top-down revolution,” which they viewed extremely hostile to their religion, culture and old traditions. To cite an example, in 1925, a law was implemented banning Ottoman and religious headgear based upon the argument that it represented somehow an uncivilized way of thinking: ‘this created a storm of reaction throughout Anatolia which resulted in repressive measures and hundreds of executions.’

A study of the effects of secularizing reforms in modern Turkey has indeed shown that the early republican Turkish intellectuals faced serious challenges vis-à-vis the people in Anatolia who had never been exposed to Western culture coming as they did from an expressly rural and more culturally isolated background. Therefore, the Kemalist intellectuals had to secure success by creating a new brand of Turkish identity replacing the culturally dominant Ottoman identity, indeed '[w]hat the Republican political elite proposed was that intellectuals should find their spiritual fulfillment in making the “imaginary” [i.e., the Western or the new Turkish identity] real for Turkey.'

According to Zurcher, the majority of the Kemalist elite included 'civil servants, teachers, academics and officers who had internalized the Kemalist dogmas and who themselves owed their position in the ruling elite to the fact that they represented the positivist, Western-oriented outlook.' When analyzing Kemalism, it is informative to consider an analysis of the mindset of the core Kemalist intellectuals themselves. Therefore it would be worth referring to an insider’s perspective such as Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu. Karaosmanoğlu belonged to this educated Kemalist elite and through his writings one can see that even simple traditional religious expressions were hysterically intolerable in the eyes of this elite, and were perceived as constituting a threat to the Kemalist cultural

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428 I base my argument on the evidence provided by Turkish writer, İpek Çalışlar: 'The republic was proclaimed, [only] a night before did Mustafa Kemal tell his friends at dinner that the regime now has to have a name.' Çalışlar, İpek. Latife Hamm, Istanbul: Dogan, 2006. p.219
431 Mardin, “Culture Change and the Intellectual,” 203.
432 Zürcher, Turkey, 234.
hegemony in the body of the state.

Karaosmanoğlu, one of the founders of and most ardent believers in Kemalism, composed the epic book *Panorama*, in which he questioned the outcomes of the societal transformations which Turkish society had undergone throughout the early years of the republic. Through the journey of the main character in the book, he seemed to have expressed his own personal anxieties about the way and which the Ataturk revolutions were negatively received by the masses in Anatolia. Karaosmanoğlu worryingly concluded that Ataturk's principles were experimental and had indeed not gone far enough as they were only truly understood by a small marginal elite, described by himself as 'rootless pioneers'\(^{433}\) of a top-down revolution vis à vis the masses,\(^{434}\) drawing in the disparate elements of Turkish society, from Anatolia to the Kurdish regions, from the Black sea region to the Mediterranean. Gellner once wrote:

> 'generally speaking, nationalist ideology suffers from pervasive false consciousness. Its myths invert reality: it claims to defend folk culture while in fact it is forging a high culture; it claims to protect an old folk society while in fact helping to build up an anonymous mass society.'\(^{435}\)

Gellner's point is thusly very relevant to the early incarnations of Kemalist nationalist ideology.

While the new republic was thusly trying to impose itself into grassroots across the country, Kurdish nationalism, as a counter nationalist project, started to take shape in flesh and bones. The first of the major Kurdish revolts can be said to have erupted in this spirit in 1925, not long after Turkey was declared a republic in 1923 and had abolished the Caliphate in 1924.\(^{436}\) The 1925 rebellion was led by Shaykh Said, an Orthodox Sunni Naqshbandi shaykh, who urged upon all Kurdish tribal leaders, other religious shaykhs and their disciples, as well as Kurdish landowners to join a rebellion he was anticipating against the newly institutionalized Turkish political system.\(^{437}\) Kurdish nationalist feelings at this

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time had not fully crystallized; particularly in the example of the Shaykh Said rebellion, they were partially motivated by Islamic theological aspects. It seemed that the Kurds had not considered the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate as a direct opportunity to construct a modern secular nationalist discourse. Indeed, when considering the failures of the Kurdish revolts, it could be argued that Islam was ultimately an unsuccessful modality of Kurdish nationalism in the early development of Kurdish national movements.438

According to the historical account provided by historian McDowall, the Shaykh Said revolt started rather prematurely because of a lack of a Kurdish political organization.

'[O]n February 8 (1925) a clash occurred at Piran [near Diyarbakır] between Shaykh Said's retainers and Turkish gendarmes. The insurgents (…) marched towards Diyarbakır. (…) While Diyarbakır absorbed and withstood the main thrust of the revolt, advances were made elsewhere. (…) On March 11 Varto439 fell to the Jibran.440 (…) after 5 days it was abandoned on account of Turkish and Alevi forces in the area. Indeed, it was largely the Khurmak441 who inhibited the planned advances [across the region.]442

These lines elude a few precise points straightaway: the 1925 movement seemed to have been a limited one in terms of active participation from all Kurdish fronts. It was locally driven, most likely fragmented and poorly coordinated. Jwaideh pointed out that the Kurdish rebellion of 1925 was 'the outcome of both nationalistic and religious causes.'443 With regard to the nationalistic dimension of the revolt, those Kurdish demands that were formulated for the withdrawal of Turkish officials from areas with a Kurdish majority and the acceptance by Ankara of Kurdish autonomy clearly demonstrated strong nationalistic desires of political detachment from the Turkish State.444 Moreover, Jwaideh argued that the Kurds, by choosing to revolt, wanted to 'oppos[e] Turkification because, as the term implies, the Kurd was to be changed into a Turk; this, of course, was tantamount to bidding the Kurd to cease to be himself and to assume a new identity.'445

439 Site of a major combat during the rebellion, Varto is a district of Muş province in Eastern Turkey.
440 The Jibran spoke 'Kurmanji' and had dominated the Hamidiye militia during the Ottoman era.
441 Adhered to the heterodox Alevi sect, the Khurmak were oppressed by the Jibran in the pre-war years.
442 McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, 194-195.
444 McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, 185.
From a religious perspective, under the Turkish government's new secularizing and westernizing policies, the Kurds believed they virtually no longer shared anything in common with the innovators of these “unfaithful” policies. Bernard Lewis once wrote that 'Islam was the traditional basis of the Ottoman state (...). It provided the principle of authority, of identity and political and social cohesion and loyalty.' In the religiously based Ottoman hierarchy, there was rather a Muslim *millet* and, the Caliphate, responsible for assuring peace, was, also, in Yeğen's words 'the guarantor of the endurance of the autonomous existence of various ethnic groups.' Though with the foundation of the Turkish republic and in the ensuing years, as Henry J. Barkey and Graham Fuller noted, 'the Kurds, who as Muslims had been equals in the Ottoman state, confronted a nationalist regime determined to assimilate them into a Turkish nation, using both education and military force.' Thus, Kurdish reactions to secularization, assimilation and the abolition of the Caliphate occurred in the context of the 1925 revolt, in which Islam occupied a significant place in comparison with other revolts in Kurdish history. Jwaideh asserted that, 'a strong Islamic sentiment came to be an important ingredient of Kurdish nationalism [in 1925]. Although the majority of the nationalists may not have shared this solicitude for religion, there is little doubt that they encouraged and fostered the Kurds' religious identity, which promised to unite their compatriots at a time of great national crisis.'

And yet, religion was far from being a unifying factor among the Kurds. For instance, the leader of the Kurdish rebellion of 1925 did not succeed in engaging the rest of the Kurdish leaders, as well as their followers, in the uprising as they were too fragmented by religious affiliation (or even by language). Alevi Kurds, who although shared common dissatisfaction and grievances toward the Turkish state, did not join the movement. David McDowall summed up the reason for the Alevi refusal in the following phrase: 'a Naqshbandi Shaykh had no standing for [Alevis], and if anything, Shaykh Said's religious

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identity was likely to have negative rather than positive impact on the Alevis. In one of the ironies of history, the Alevi Kurds did not get any support from the Sunni Kurds either, when they rose up against the Turkish state a few years later. This may be considered as one of the first major Sunni-Alevi split in the Kurdish movement, later echoed in a history of internal fragmentation. The President of the Turkish military tribunal (in Turkish, Şark İstiklal Mahkemeleri) at the time was persuaded that if anything, rebels were united on one point, to create an independent Kurdistan, and accused them of 'revolting under the pretext of abuse by the governmental administration and [invoking] the defense of the Caliphate.' By mid-April 1925, the spiritual leader Shaykh Said who had succeeded in rallying his followers to commit themselves to such an uprising, and nearly twenty-six of his closest associates were caught and hanged.

After the suppression of the 1925 revolts, this time, initiators of the future Kurdish revolts were in exile, mainly in Lebanon and were persuaded that they could only succeed against Kemalist troops with a robust military enterprise. Thus, the path that led them to the Mount Ararat uprising was paved with their clear intentions to form and send a Kurdish army into the mountainous Kurdish regions within Turkey by uniting all Kurdish tribes, unlike in the past. When the PKK launched an armed struggle against the Turkish army in the mid-1980s, it indeed considered itself as a continuation of the Kurdish fighters of the Mount Ararat rebellion, having learned lessons of the failures of the Mount Ararat revolt.

A new party, called Khoybun (in Kurdish, being one's own self) was formed with the aim

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451 McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, 194.
452 For more details, see: Olson, Robert W. The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925. Austin: University of Texas, 1989.
453 Three Tribunals of Independence were established in 1925, two in the East and one in Ankara. The tribunals remained operational until March 1927, and were, in Ayse Hür's words, a scene of 'settling of accounts.' Thousands of people were charged under the pretext of revolting or opposing to the hat law or for reasons of communist activity. Cf. Hür, “1908-1938 Döneminde Hukuk Dışı Uygulamalar,” 264-265
457 Khoybun is a pan-Kurdish party formed in Bhamdoun, Lebanon, in October 1927 by Kurdish intellectuals.
of establishing such a politico-military force, which 'hoped to avoid' in McDowall's words, 'the mistakes of the past, particularly the schisms that had dogged [previous] efforts.'\footnote{McDowall, \textit{A Modern History of the Kurds}, 203.} \footnote{Chaliand, \textit{Les Kurdes et le Kurdistan}, 97.} The founding congress of Khoybun gathered

'in August 1927, in the Lebanese town of Bhamdun, representatives from all circles [from across the region, in particular Turkey], Kurdish political parties and organisations (Association for recovery of Kurdistan, Committee of Kurdish independence, Kurdish Social Committee) (…), [and] Vahan Papazyan, an Armenian leader from Dashnak party as a sign of Armenian-Kurdish alliance.'\footnote{According to Alakom, the Khoybun and the Dashnak party have maintained an active relationship until 1947. Cf. Alakom, Rohat. \textit{Xoybûn Örgütü ve Ağrı Ayaklanması}. [Xoybun and Ağrı rebellion] Istanbul: Avesta, 2011. p.80} 

The then Armenian-Kurdish alliance made sense within the framework of a late sympathy shown by the Kurdish representatives towards Armenian national aspirations. \footnote{Chaliand, \textit{Les Kurdes et le Kurdistan}, 98.} Both sides were keen to forge reconciliation after Kurdish involvement in the Armenian genocide. \footnote{Cf. Gunter, \textit{The A to Z of the Kurds}, 99.} 

In the first clashes of the Ararat rebellion, Kurdish forces under General Ihsan Nuri Pasha were able to defeat the Turkish military in many areas. Eventually, however, Turkey gradually crushed the revolt in the Ararat area. The dramatic consequences of the Ararat rebellion further demonstrated that Kurdish leaders perhaps underestimated the lack of homogeneity among their forces, both mobilized and immobilized. Once again, internal religious subdivisions among the Kurdish community greatly weighed, and 'broader group support did not materialize.'\footnote{Romano, \textit{The Kurdish Nationalist Movement}, 104.} Also, the relative openness of Kurdish rebels to the authorities' conciliation ability in persuading them to lay down arms or simply associate with them, has been a major factor which was perhaps downplayed. But above all, it was the regional political conjuncture that the Kurdish front could not fully anticipate. 

Historians interested in Kurdish movements of this period in history agree that Ararat was initially chosen as the area to begin the revolt because of the ease of communication with Iran, who had promised to support the Kurdish movement.\footnote{Chaliand, \textit{Les Kurdes et le Kurdistan}, 98.} But Iran “unexpectedly”
cooperated with Turkey.  

Indeed, once "Turkey obtained border modifications with Iran, which allowed Turkey to surround the Kurdish rebels and cut off their retreat into nearby Iran," the rebels were literally finished. As McDowall noted, from the beginning of the insurgency, 'the Kurds' ability to sustain cooperation a credible force in the field [actually] remained contingent on the willingness of Iran to turn a blind eye.' The fate of the Ararat rebellion would have been different, had such Iranian-Turkish cooperation been foreseen. Even though it is widely believed that it is the military superiority of the Turkish army that discouraged Kurdish rebels and led to their capitulation, Turkey's cooperation with Iran played a key role for Turkey to resume total control over the territory in question, as early as 1931.  

This cooperation between Iran and Turkey was significant as it demonstrated, how the different countries that had governed Kurdistan played their Kurdish populations against each other, as well as neighboring states, which has come to be known as “playing the Kurdish card.”

The Revolt of Mount Ararat 'has been the greatest of all Kurdish revolts throughout Kurdistan,' Vanly carefully noted in a written interview given to M. Vanguélis Sakkatos, editor for *Nouvel Observateur*, in 1959. Vanly, Kurdish intellect and activist, continued in this piece that the 1930 revolt should be seen as 'the [Kurdish] war of independence' led by the politico-military organization Khoybun whose main objective was to establish a

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468 Barkey, J. Henri, “Under the Gun: Turkish Foreign Policy and the Kurdish Question.” *In The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s*, edited by Robert Olson: 65-83. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996. Although Barkey makes a case for Syria having supported the PKK, the idea that the Kurds constitute an entity destabilizing Turkey can be generalizable.
469 Khoybun cooperated with the Armenian Dashnak party, which was anti-Russian, and the Russians took Turkish side as they saw this alliance dangerous for their state integrity. More on these complicated relations between Turks, Russians, and Iranians on one side; and the Kurds and Armenians the other, see: Alakom, *Xoybûn Örgütü*, 99-114. For a more contemporary vision on Russia widening its margins for maneuver in Central Asia and the Caucasus, see: Olson, “The Kurdish Question.” 1996.
Kurdish state,⁴⁷¹ and whose main commander-in-chief was Ihsan Nuri Pasha.⁴⁷² Vanly's views were interestingly reflected nearly a decade later in the memoirs of Riza Nur, Turkish politician yet ardent opponent of the Kemalist regime that,

'[t]his revolt is the result of the bloody repression of the Shaykh Said revolt. Until then, only the Bederkhan⁴⁷³ family was [pro-Kurdish]. The Kurdish masses did not even know the meaning of the Kurdish cause. But now, the idea of a free Kurdistan is widespread among the Kurds. Kurdistan has become a new Macedonia.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷¹ Alakom, Xoybûn Örgüti, 32.
⁴⁷² At the time of this interview Ihsan Nuri Pasha lived in Tehran under house arrest.
⁴⁷³ Bederkhan pasha was first brought to Istanbul with his family during the reign of the Ottoman sultan Abdülmecid to be punished for rebellion in 1847. He then was exiled to Crete. After his death, Bederkhan's close family stayed within the Kurdish community in Istanbul. Alakom, Eski Istanbul Kürtleri, 40-41.
The last traditional Kurdish revolt: the third stage of Kemalism

The third stage of Kemalism, as formulated by Bozarslan, begins from the end of the Ararat rebellion in early 1930 and ends with the crushing of the third biggest Kurdish revolt, the Dersim rebellion in 1938. Yeğen advanced the theory of *categoric denial* of Kurds, emerged throughout the 1930s. He suggested that denial is not something that happens overnight. The Kurds were first denied existence politically and juristically, which was the basis of their physical denial. According to Yeğen, the attractiveness of the rising totalitarian regimes in the 1930s Europe, the worry that the Kurds will be incited by the Westerners, and the need to become a nation were three reasons that led Turkey to deny the Kurds their rights.\(^{475}\)

Politically this period was characterized by a Turkish one-party system, or rather, one Party-state system, showing no tolerance whatsoever for any oppositional political force of any kind in Turkey's political arena. Over time, Kemalism had become a decidedly anti-liberal and anti-democratic regime, paradoxically remote from the achievements of European states at the time, from which Atatürk had initially drawn on for the Turkish example.\(^{476}\)

The third Kurdish revolt broke out in such a context in Dersim, where Kemalism meant both forced assimilation policies (applied to non-Turkish elements on Turkish soil) as well as preventive military measures against potential or real group separatisms. In fact, after the 1930 uprisings, small-scale uprisings had continued to erupt in the Kurdish regions leading to the Turkish Assembly passing new settlement laws in 1934. These laws aimed at depopulating “rebellious” Kurdish areas, dispersing the populations from there toward Western Turkey. Undertaken within the legal framework for more “effective policy of pacification” these laws also aimed at preventing further Kurdish revolts against Turkish authorities.\(^{477}\)

In 1935, another law, called *Tunceli Act*, was adopted, which aimed to head off similar rebellions, particularly in the Dersim province. According to Kerem Öktem, the purpose of

\(^{475}\) Yeğen, “Türk Devleti, Kürt Sorunu,” 197.


this Act was that 'the republican state had decided to use Dersim as an example for its strategy of “civilizing” the “others” of the republic through annihilation and enforced assimilation.'\textsuperscript{478} It seemed clear that the central government was so agitated about Dersim; Van Bruinesen has pointed out that this was because 'Dersim was by the mid-1930s, the last part of Turkey that had not been effectively brought under central government control.'\textsuperscript{479} And now with the new \textit{Tunceli Act}, the deportation of the tribes of Dersim was officially under way. The reason that the Turkish state took such a heavy preemptive measure was because of its lack of influence within Dersim. Dersim had its own tribal chieftains and religiously influential leaders who governed the community in this province. Mostly populated by Alevi, Dersim province was given a new name, \textit{Tunceli} (Land of Copper). Atatürk's speeches at the Turkish National Assembly, comparing Dersim with the 'head of a boil which must be crushed'\textsuperscript{480} gave clues as to the approaching annihilation campaign of the Kurdish-Alevi community by the Turkish military. It was not until recently that a retired Turkish general would publicly state that Atatürk himself had given the orders for the Dersim military operations.\textsuperscript{481}

Despite the aforementioned military and judicial state measures, the Dersim revolt still took place. It was led by the Alevi cleric Seyid Rıza and his fellow leaders. Throughout the summer of 1938, the Turkish government concentrated three army corps and most of its aviation around Dersim.

'[T]he aerial bombing, gas and artillery barrages were resumed. With the rebel refusal to surrender, more villages were razed. [Turkish soldiers] traversed the whole of Dersim from one end to another, rounding up rebels, burning villages and declaring as 'uninhabitable zones' all those areas, for example with caves, which favoured guerrilla warfare.'\textsuperscript{482}

Placed in a comparative context, the Dersim rebellion differed greatly from the previous

\textsuperscript{478} \textsuperscript{479} Öktem, Turkey, 36.
\textsuperscript{480} Excerpts from “Tunceli Law (1935) and the Dersim Massacre” by İsmail Beşikçi.
\textsuperscript{482} McDowall, \textit{A Modern History of the Kurds}, 208-209.
ones in its pre-revolt levels.\textsuperscript{483} While in the former cases, Kurdish rebels, nourished by religious sentiments, self-organized themselves and launched insurgency mainly in reaction to state policies, the Dersim rebellion occurred directly as a result of severe, unprecedented military measures taken by the Turkish government along with the new resettlement laws.

From 1935 onward, since Dersim was a mountainous area and in order for soldiers to be able to move freely, new roads and bridges were constructed. A few dozens military headquarters were additionally built. Special local governors from Ankara were appointed to take office. Finally, these new measures were accompanied and followed by military operations. Thus, unlike the commencement of the Shaykh Said or Mount Ararat rebellions, the Dersim uprising resulted directly in reaction to the government's extraordinary military occupation. It was estimated that at the end of the rebellion tens of thousands of people had perished, and many subjected to mass deportations,\textsuperscript{484}

\begin{quote}
'[p]eople were trapped in caves or barns where Turkish soldiers set fire. Forests surrounded by troops were burned to exterminate those who had sought refuge. Collective suicides were committed: many Kurdish women and girls threw themselves into the river Munzur. Dersim, even more than other parts of Kurdistan, was completely devastated.'\textsuperscript{485}
\end{quote}

At the end of 1938, Dersim marked the end of the traditional Kurdish revolts against the Turkish state. And it was not until fall 1946 'was it decided to lift the special emergency regime for Tunceli, and allow deported families to return home.'\textsuperscript{486} Ihsan Sabri Caglayangil who was in charge of the execution teams during the rebellion, in his memoirs shared with the reader how people in Dersim were left to die in caves.\textsuperscript{487} The revolt and popular resistance in Dersim was analyzed in Chaliand's collective volume in the following sentence:

'The people of Dersim had heard of the fate of the pacified regions of Kurdistan: mass deportations, executions, overwhelming taxes, forced mobilization in the

\textsuperscript{483} Romano, \textit{The Kurdish Nationalist Movement}, 2006.

\textsuperscript{484} Gündoğan, Nezahat, and Kazım Gündoğan. \textit{Dersim'in Kayıp Kızları: “Tertele Çenequ.”} [Lost Girls of Dersim.] Istanbul: İletişim, 2013. This book is based on in-depth and face-to-face interviews with the relatives of the women who were deported from their homes in the aftermath of the Dersim operations between 1937 and 1938. It documents the life story of more than a hundred women originating from Dersim who lost their parents.

\textsuperscript{485} Chaliand, \textit{Les Kurdes et le Kurdistan}, 103.

\textsuperscript{486} McDowall, \textit{A Modern History of the Kurds}, 209.

construction of roads and military installations etc. this is why they were determined to resist till the end.\footnote{Chaliand, \textit{Les Kurdes et le Kurdistan}, 102.}

As for Van Bruinessen, he inquired into the extent of the suppression of the 1938 revolt as to whether a genocide or an \textit{ethnocide} took place in Dersim. His conclusion was:

'(…) the thrust of the government effort, including the operations in Dersim, was not so much directed against 'feudalism' and backwardness as against Kurdish ethnic identity. The brutal Dersim campaign was but the culmination of a series of measures taken in order to forcibly assimilate the Kurds (…).


Celal Bayer, the then Turkish minister of the interior, 'was reported to have declared in the Turkish National Assembly that the Kurdish problem no longer existed and that the brigands had been forcibly civilized.'\footnote{Jwaideh, \textit{The Kurdish National Movement}, 216.} That statement remained the indicator of Turkey's “official ideology” toward the Kurds for a long time.\footnote{Idem.} As an interesting development in recent decades, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan publicly declared his apologies on behalf of the Turkish state over the killings during the 1938 rebellion, on November 23, 2011.\footnote{Çandar, Cengiz. “Başbakan Dersim’le ‘Resmi Tarih’i Yırttı.” [The Prime minister tore a hole in the Official Ideology] \textit{Radikal}, November 24, 2011. Accessed November 25, 2011. \url{http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/cengiz-candar/basbakan-dersimle-resmi-tarihi-yirtti-1070465/}}

\section*{Concluding remarks.}

In the aftermath of the Turkish War of Independence and the Treaty of Lausanne, the Kurdish self-determination opportunity was missed by the early Kurdish activists, provoking them into revolts against newly emerging centralist Kemalist regime in Turkey at the turn of the twentieth century. Turkey's evolution as a secular and ethnically homogeneous and ideologically Kemalist formation weakened historical and emotive bonds that could bring unity and solidarity among the peoples of the Turkish republic, giving rise to Kurdish nationalism\footnote{Özhan, Taha and Ete Hatem. \textit{Kürt Meselesi Problemler ve Çözüm Önerileri} [The Kurdish Question, Problems and Future prospects] Ankara: Seta Analiz, 2008. p.11} that expressed itself in rebellion and initially with an Islamic undertone. The shift towards a Kurdish ethno-secular, nationalist agenda did not come to
fruition until post-1960.

Between 1920 and 1938 Turkey faced three major Kurdish rebellions all of which were suppressed by the Turkish military. Chris Kutschera described this period as '[t]he long 'reign' of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk,' and as 'the darkest period in the history of the Kurds in Turkey.' My analysis of Kurdish revolts throughout the early years of the nascent Turkish republic does not aim to assess or remedy the relative failures of the Kurdish revolts. Rather, this historical analysis is based on the articulation of Kurdish nationalist claims against the backdrop of a repressive and assimilationist political context. Kurdish nationalist claims cannot be separated from ethnic, political, cultural and sectarian trends of their era in which the Kurdish national project developed on an upward trajectory among a people who had traditionally been stateless. Therefore, these revolts have been significant in the development of a Kurdish collective national consciousness, constituting the base for the proto-social movement phase of Kurdish history, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER THREE

A proto-social movement through the Kurdish case

(between 1960 to 2000)

Introduction

Kurdish nationalist history has provided inspiration for the continuation of Kurdish movements. Usually evoking bitterness in the Kurdish experience, this history has contributed to the consolidation of a collective memory through struggles of various forms. In this chapter I specifically focus on the period between 1960 to 2000. Despite the fact that this period has been marked by increasing nationalist activities, elements of a proto-social movement can be identified.

Throughout the fall of 1967, Kurdish activists mobilize through the Eastern meetings in the East and Southeast of Turkey. In İsmail Beşikçi's analysis, 'the Eastern meetings constitute an important opposition movement led by the well-educated, revolutionary and democrat Kurds expressing their demands for social and economic equality.' The protest is against both the state policies and the traditional social order in which the Kurds are kept by their local aghas and shaikhs. However, the Turkish state proves unyielding toward Kurdish demands, and the traditional social order does not significantly change. Moreover, the 1971 coup d'état comes to destroy the initial stages of what could have potentially become a fully-fledged social movement. The possibility of resolving the Kurdish issue is thus lost for years to come.

With the emergence of the PKK in 1978, a decisively nationalist movement takes over


497 Beşikçi's observation confirms my argument in that the demands by Kurdish youths, poor peasants and many others were shadowed by the 1971 coup, while Turkish democrats and revolutionaries were prevented from supporting the Kurds as their demonstrations were shown in the public opinion as being backed by backward aghas and shaykhs.' Source: Beşikçi, İsmail. Devletlerarası Sömürge Kürdistan, Bilim, Resmi Ideoloji, Devlet, Demokrasi ve Kürt Sorunu. [Kurdistan: An interstate colony] Paris: Institut kurde de Paris, 1990. p. 79-80.
instead. As the PKK begins its armed struggle in 1984, it finds support among the Kurdish population. We witness in the ensuing years what many analysts define as a low-conflict war between the Turkish army and the Kurdish guerrillas.  

While the armed conflict continues, from a social movement perspective, an interesting phenomenon occurs in the 1990s. We observe the emergence of political parties and non-governmental organizations with an openly Kurdish platform. Ingrained in civil society particularly toward the end of the decade, these organizations constitute the necessary resources for a social movement, those upon which Kurdish activists will mostly rely, especially in later years. My argument is that the Kurdish struggle from 1960 through to 2000 proves to be a precursor for the formation of a Kurdish social movement post-2000.

First I will explore the background to the Eastern meetings and how they evolve. Then, I will discuss the aims of the Kurdish nationalist movement with the emergence of the PKK at the helm, with a secessionist agenda. Finally I will draw attention to Kurdish social movement bases, which emerged in the 1990s, offering a framework within which Kurdish activists and ordinary citizens could organize. It is important to note that these same bases were subsequently used by Kurdish activists in the period following 2000.

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The background to the Eastern meetings
(1967)

After the suppression of the first Kurdish revolts, the Turkish state was confident that it had extinguished Kurdish national aspirations permanently. In reality, this was not the case. Although large-scale, anti-centralist uprisings did not take place until the 1960s, Kurdish identity was kept alive underground within Turkey or in exile, as Kurdish nationalists and political activists continued to agitate for Kurdish rights. In fact, from the suppression of the Dersim revolt in 1938 until the Eastern meetings in the late 1960s, it can be argued that Kurdish identity and its associated political movements suffered from what French historian Jean Pierre Filiu refers to as 'social fatigue.'

Filiu, in his analysis of societies in the Arab world before the initial Arab spring movements in 2011, asserted that the people in those countries had been experiencing a similar social fatigue for a relatively long time. The experience of the youth in the Arab world prior to the Arab spring can be read as analogous to the Kurdish expressions of social fatigue, which abounded as a result of the steadily deteriorating socio-economic conditions in the Kurdish regions of Turkey as well as of the constant threats against them so as not to revolt against the state. Thus, the 1960 Eastern mobilization was made possible when people, fatigued as they were by the maintenance of a status quo which heavily disadvantaged them, no longer “feared” the threats of the authorities and the military, and ultimately felt able to express themselves publicly and demonstrate their discontentment mainly through democratic means.

İsmail Beşikçi’s reading of Turkish history provides further insight into this specific period marked by social fatigue. Between 1930 and 1950 in particular, namely during the single-party reign, the Kurds were kept in conditions of social deprivation and neglect. Bringing

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infrastructure such as electricity, roads, water supply, schools and other public services and facilities to the Kurdish regions was beyond consideration, as it was believed that this would ultimately reawaken a sense of national consciousness among the Kurdish community.\textsuperscript{502} The alienation of the Kurds in those years have been bitterly documented by the renowned journalist Mehmet Ali Birand in the following anecdote: ‘I would always see them [the locals] walk on the dirt roads and not on the pavement. One day I asked them why. “Oh,” they said, “pavements belong to the State, not to us.”’\textsuperscript{503} If industrialization is responsible for the emergence of modern nations as Ernest Gellner sees it,\textsuperscript{504} then the Turkish government, by restricting socio-economic growth and development in the Kurdish regions, prevented a sense of Kurdish nationalism from emerging.

Two interrelated factors changed this equation from the 1950s onward. First, with the adoption of a multi-party system, politicians showed more interest for the region's problems as a measure to secure electoral support. Second, tribal and religious Kurdish figures were given an opportunity to be involved in Turkish politics, a phenomenon explained by Hamit Bozarslan by the 'clientalist nature of the political system, which made parties dependent on tribal or religious voting power (...).	extsuperscript{505} In any case, the Turkish state's initial fears were more or less justified in that such overtures undertaken in the Kurdish regions, even if shallow and limited, resulted in the mobilization of a Kurdish community through the Eastern meetings expressing a growing sense of Kurdishness.

Bozarslan provides additional analysis about the factors that propelled the Kurds into collective action. The first is the pluralistic political environment of the 1960s, which was inviting for social mobilization. In the words of Ayse Betül Celik,

'[t]he immediate cause was the 1961 Constitution, considered to be the constitution providing the most explicit protection of freedom of association. The rights granted by the Constitution promoted the foundation of trade unions and student organizations, which would play an important role in the Turkish politics (...)'.\textsuperscript{506}

One of the experts on Kurdish history, Aliza Marcus noted that 'this expansion of Turkey's

\textsuperscript{502} Beşikçi, Devletlerarası Sömürge Kürdistan, 77.
\textsuperscript{503} Birand, Mehmet Ali. Apo ve PKK. Istanbul, Milliyet, 1992. p.56
\textsuperscript{505} Bozarslan, Hamit. “Political Aspects of the Kurdish Problem,” 98
\textsuperscript{506} Celik, “Ethnopolitical Conflict in Turkey,” 246.
democracy coincided with the rise of a more educated and cosmopolitan Kurdish population.\footnote{Marcus, Aliza. \textit{Blood and Belief - The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence}. 2007, New York: New York University Press, 2007. p.19} Indeed, more Kurds were attending university and being exposed to new ideas conveyed by the revolutionary and leftist currents of their era. For Bozarslan, although the Kurdish activists were perplexed as to how they would associate their Kurdishness and nationalist ambitions with the agendas of Turkey's labor and student movements, a Kurdish intelligentsia emerged as a second factor and played a key role in bridging this gap. The third factor was the cross-border effect of the \textit{Barzani} Rebellion from 1961 to 1970 that led to the creation of an autonomous Kurdish region within Iraq. According to Bozarslan, this outcome energized national consciousness among Turkey's Kurds,\footnote{Bozarslan, Hamit. “Political Aspects of the Kurdish Problem,” 96-97.} and in the words of Aliza Marcus, 'caught the imagination of Turkish Kurds,'\footnote{Marcus, \textit{Blood and Belief}, 20.} who would at least follow on regional radios the news of their compatriots from Iraq.\footnote{Birand, \textit{Apo ve PKK}, 70.}

Within this rather “democratic” environment, Kurds initiated legal mobilization in both associations and political parties. The establishment of the \textit{Türkiye İşçi Partisi} [in English, Workers Party of Turkey, TIP] in 1961 was a milestone in the legal Kurdish mobilization. The party gained support from the middle-class “progressives” in Istanbul, and overwhelmingly from Kurds and Alevi workers in the countryside.\footnote{Celik, “Ethnopolitical Conflict in Turkey,” 246-247.} Its political agenda focused on how to overcome poverty and promote socio-economic equality. In fact, the leading members of the Eastern meetings as well as many of the participants were politically active within the TIP.\footnote{Beşikçi, \textit{Devletlerarası Sömürge Kürdistan}, 79.}

The ways in which social actors were advancing their agendas within the TIP are worthy of scrutiny to see how the social and economic conditions in which people find themselves in different parts of the same country determine the contours of their common struggle. For example, the TIP was advancing what could be considered as a class struggle in urban cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir in its fight against the “capitalist exploitation” already in place; whereas in the Kurdish regions, it was more a question of altering the social
structures of the Kurdish community, controlled by local aghas and shaykhs, into which capitalism had not yet penetrated – as was the case in the Western parts of the country.

While the concern was consolidating trade unions and the rights of workers and other disadvantaged categories vis-à-vis the capital owners and their “illegitimate” gains in Istanbul and other big cities, the debate revolved around land reforms and the abolishment of feudal agha systems in the Kurdish provinces such as Diyarbakır, as well as the negative impact of smuggling toward the border regions. This period of Turkish-Kurdish history is particularly dynamic because we have in the same setting two different forces operating against state mechanisms, while simultaneously feeding into one another. On one hand, the focus is placed on class liberation for Turkish workers and unionists, whereas on the other, priority is placed on the liberation of Kurdish peasants from the yoke of aghas and shaykhs. At this stage, the problems in the East were not seen as linked to an ethnic problem, but as the outcome of state-sponsored exploitation of Eastern and Southeastern regions to the detriment of the people living there. Therefore, the overall idea was that a socialist struggle would liberate the totality of the disadvantaged communities, including the Kurds. 513

'Easterner! Work hard to achieve your constitutional rights.' 514

'Toward the end of the 1960s, the mentality that considered the Kurds as Turks, and the Kurdish language as a dialect of the Turkish language was being overcome. First the Kurds themselves, then the Turkish revolutionaries increased their level of criticism on this matter. In the summer of 1967 the Eastern meetings took place in several Kurdish towns and districts, and in 1969 the Revolutionary Cultural Eastern Associations were established.' 515

The Eastern meetings started on August 13, 1967 in Silvan to 'protest against the backwardness of the East and South-east Anatolia regions,' 516 continued in Diyarbakır on September 3, 1967, Siverek on September 24, 1967, Batman on October 8, 1967, Tunceli on October 15, 1967, Ağrı on October, 22 1967, and ended in Ankara on November 18,

514 From the banners. Cf. Beşiğiçi, Doğu Mititinglerinin Analizi, 24-25. (My translation from Turkish)
515 Beşiğiçi, Devletlerarası Sömürge Kürdistan, 81. (My translation from Turkish)
1967.⁵¹⁷ They marked a turning point in the history of modern Kurdish activism in Turkey, since it was the first time in three decades that the Kurds were mobilizing in mass demonstrations. Once again, the discourse at the meetings 'emphasized the relative deprivation of “the East,” and raised the issue that Easterners should get as great a share in national capital and resources as “Westerners.”’⁵¹⁸

For Mehdi Zana, one of the organizers of the Eastern meetings and mayor of Diyarbakır a decade later, these were in fact the first legal Kurdish rallies since the early 1920s. Some of the facts he raised remain of particular interest:

’There [were] too many people: nationalists, sympathizers. As soon as I uttered a few welcoming words, municipal agents cut the sound. So I addressed my speech without a microphone, but one [could] still hear me. The demonstrators seemed happy. This was something unusual for them, and it boosted their morale. By 1967, together with other Kurdish activists in neighboring provinces, we decided to keep up with this experience of organizing democratic rallies in as many Kurdish cities as possible, including Diyarbakır, Bitlis, Muş, etc.. For the first time, I [was speaking] publicly about the Kurdish problem and Kurdistan. The police, too, [were] massively attending our meetings while the rumor had already begun to spread: “the people are demonstrating in the East...”’⁵¹⁹

Beşikçi was able to observe the Eastern meetings first-hand, qualifying them as the beginning of a new era of politics, initiated mostly by Kurdish activists, whose banners read:

’Easterner! Work hard to achieve your constitutional rights. Demanding your rights is not a menace to [state] unity! Civilization [for the] West, illiteracy [for the] East, why is this? We do not want gendarmes, but teachers! We do not want gendarme headquarters, but schools! National income: Manisa 2350, Ağrı 500; Aydin 2500, Hakkari 250 Five-year plan⁵²⁰ is a lie! Easterner wake up!’

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⁵¹⁹ Zana, La prison no 5, 5. (My translation from French)
⁵²⁰ “[A] major reform was a return to economic planning, with the establishment of the State Planning Organization in 1960 that was to prepare the new Five Year Development Plans, the first of which was initiated in 1963. When in 1965 the Democratic Party, renamed Justice Party, returned to power, the authority of the State Planning Organization over economic policy was reduced, but it remained an influential institution, highly respected in Kemalist and more left circles. It showed from the beginning a great concern with the economic disparities — especially regional inequalities — that critics associated with the type of development fostered by the Democratic Party.’ Source for quotation: Van Bruinessen, Martin. “İsmail Beşikçi: Turkish sociologist, critic of Kemalism, and Kurdologist.” The Journal of Kurdish Studies V (2003-04 [2005]): 19-34.
Our aim is to achieve constitutional liberty and equality and happiness!\textsuperscript{521}

Some of the repercussions of state policy causing regional economic impoverishment and social injustice can be examined through data published by the State Institute of Statistics (DIF in Turkish acronym) in 1963.\textsuperscript{522} Key figures show quite clearly that the people living in Turkey's East and Southeast were kept in poverty and that their living conditions were much harsher in comparison to Turkey's average. The data, as assessed by Ismail Beşikçi, read as following:

\begin{quote}
'Area of Turkey: 780 576 square km, the Eastern Anatolia regions comprise 22.53\% of Turkey's surface and present 13\% of total population i.e., 32 million people. The number of people per square meter is 40 in Turkey, whereas this number drops to 23 in the East. The degree of urbanization reaches 28.3\% in Turkey and 17.2\% in the East. There is a total of 1981 bank locations in Turkey, only 9.4\% of them are situated in the East. Literacy rates vary regionally too: around 64\% in Turkey and 24.3\% in the East. There are 2995 doctors and specialists in Istanbul against none in Hakkari, 1 in Bitlis, 1 in Bingöl, and 14 in Ağrı.'\textsuperscript{523}
\end{quote}

The state's negligence of Kurdish regions was believed to be rooted in ethnic discrimination. In other words, it was because ethnic Kurds lived in the East that the state showed little or no interest in the socio-economic development of that area. That said, participants also seemed to go against the shackles of their own traditions, denouncing the fact that themselves and many other Kurds were being exploited by Kurdish aghas or religious shaikhs whose interests did not match those of ordinary Kurds.\textsuperscript{524}

Tilly defends the idea that the dynamics of social protests cannot be separated from their political, economic and social contexts. This is clearly true with the Eastern meetings, which developed against the backdrop of a discriminatory Turkish regime with demands for economic progress and social justice. The Eastern meetings exemplify Tilly's focus on contextual circumstances in two ways. First, the people living in Turkey's East and Southeast believed that the source of discrimination against them was the state itself. However curiously, the overall political context presented itself less adverse for

\textsuperscript{521} Beşikçi, \textit{Doğu Mitingleri'nin Analizi}, 24-25. (My translation from Turkish)
\textsuperscript{522} Beşikçi, \textit{Doğu Mitingleri'nin Analizi}, 112-115. (My translation from Turkish)
\textsuperscript{523} Idem.
\textsuperscript{524} Idem.
mobilization than in the preceding years, in part thanks to the 1960 constitution,\textsuperscript{525} which gave significant rights to civil society such as '(…) broad freedoms to form associations, publish, organize trade unions, and call strikes – all limited since the founding of the republic.'\textsuperscript{526} In fact, such a political context brought 'together Kurdish leaders from many parties on the right and the left, fostering a sense of community and highlighting the political relevance of Kurdish identity.'\textsuperscript{527}

The insights provided by Beşikçi, Bozarslan and Tilly allow me to argue that the Eastern meetings marked the beginning of a proto-social movement in the Kurdish example. It did not become a fully-fledged social movement mainly because of the 1971 military coup, which came to extinguish the aspirations of Kurdish activists for social equality and justice. However, the initial political system proved conducive to the organization of a proto-social movement, as activists were allowed to mobilize in opposition to the government's social and economic policies within a less rigid environment. Moreover, the mobilization was done through the articulations of a newly-framed Kurdish collective identity. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Kurds in Turkey have had troubles with the Turkish state since its creation. In the 1960s, by shifting their focus on the themes of socio-economic equality, regional development and citizenship rights, the Kurds were able to formulate a new discourse in which they could emphasize their \textit{Kurdishness} without pursuing ethnic separation from Turkey. They framed the injustices they experienced differently than in previous years. The fact that the protesters were mainly of Kurdish origin was a secondary factor in their mobilization.

As Bozarslan rightly argued, the demands and motives of the people involved in the Eastern meetings were hardly nationalist:

'Until 1969-70, the demands were primarily concerned with civic and social rights,

\textsuperscript{525} To read the full text of the constitution, see: Topuz, Hıfızı and Insal Hüsamettin. \textit{Cumhuriyetin Beş Dönemeci. [Five Turns of the Republic]} Izmir: Sergi., 1984. p.164-199.

\textsuperscript{526} 'In 1960, the Turkish military staged a coup to halt what was seen as Prime Minister Adnan Menderes's increasingly autocratic rule. Ironically the coup which had the backing of the educated elite, ushered in the most liberal period the people had known. A group of academics was invited to draw up a new constitution.' Source for quotation: Marcus, \textit{Blood and Belief}. 2007.

rather than with the recognition of a specific national identity. They focused around issues such as being recognized as full citizens by the state and being given the same rights as other citizens; an active struggle against under-development; state investment; the construction of schools and dispensaries; road, bridge and factory construction; and the mechanism of agriculture.\textsuperscript{528}

I argue that had such demands been met satisfactorily by the authorities, the Kurdish movement could have evolved from a proto-social movement to a permanent social movement, and perhaps the Kurdish question would have been resolved. Instead, the Turkish system became militaristic and the Kurdish movement turned into a purely nationalist movement toward the end of the 1970s. I found this argument has been supported in a first-hand account given by one of the first PKK cadres, Muzaffer Ayata.\textsuperscript{529}

During his interview with Çelik and referring to the period following the Eastern meetings, Ayata attested:

'Had the TIP not been closed down and [the Kurds] been granted rights, things might have been very different. Everything might have been resolved through civil society and politics, and we might not have experienced the Maraş massacre, the Diyarbakır prison, that much racism and torture...\textsuperscript{530}

Besides, under heavy repression of the 1971 military coup, the Turkish left and other democratic forces of the country gradually failed to embrace the Kurds with their distinct identity in the long term.\textsuperscript{531} Ayata continued:

'The main axis of conflict between Turkish socialists and us [Kurdish students and activists, mainly in Ankara] revolved around this: Is Kurdistan a colony? Or is it not? Should the Kurds self-organize or not? Turkish socialists insisted on [joint] socialism but said that there was no need for the Kurds to separately organize. But we came to the conclusion that, yes, the Kurds should organize themselves with a socialist ideology, but, no, they should do so separately, in Kurdistan.\textsuperscript{532}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[528] Bozarslan, “Political Aspects of the Kurdish Problem,” 99.
\item[529] Muzaffer Ayata was a student at the Hacettepe University in Ankara in 1976. First he met with Öcalan and his friends that were already active within the revolutionary circles. Subsequently, Ayata joined the PKK. He was imprisoned following the 1980 military coup for many long years. Today he is in the ranks of the PKK in Qandil mountains, Northern Iraq. His writings can be seen to be published in a Frankfort-based Kurdish daily, Özgür Politika.
\item[530] Çelik, Sürgün(de) Kürtler, 131. (My translation from Turkish). This book is based on in-depth and biographical interviews with 14 Kurdish activists, (amongst them a journalist, a poet, a writer and a lawyer) who have been exiled in Europe. It offers original insight into recent Turkish and Kurdish history through the lives, memoirs and activities of the interviewees.
\item[532] Çelik, Sürgün(de) Kürtler, 86. (My translation from Turkish)
\end{footnotes}
The Kurdish struggle from the 1970s through to the 1990s

The Kurds began to develop a modern sense of nationalism in Turkey after the 1970s, when Turkish nationalism had already reached a certain degree of maturity. It had already been half a century since the first Kemalist conceptions of Turkish nationalism were received by a “homogenized” group of people tied by a religious (Sunni) and linguistic (Turkish) background. These conceptions had also been diffused among other communities in Turkey who were not always of Sunni religion or native Turkish speakers. 533

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, different ideological trends were continuing to spread around the world through leftist, student, revolutionary and class-based movements. Turkey proved to be influenced by these broader developments and transformations. As for the Kurds in Turkey, after a rather inconsequential trial of Eastern meetings, they were particularly influenced by the Soviet model of the resolution of national issues on a theoretical level: the idea according to which the application of socialist principles and the revolutionary struggle of a nation are intertwined. And, by national liberation struggles, namely in Latin America and Asia, on a practical level: the Kurdish guerrilla movement started in 1984. 534

Kurdish activists conveyed these adopted ideas among the Kurds, whom they believed to be left out in the periphery to the hands of “cruel” landlords and traditional tribal shaikhs of Kurdish origin as well as under deliberate Turkish state policies aiming to discriminate against them, all of which were the themes already present in the Eastern mobilization movements. 535 The nuance was that Kurdish activists pointed to a parallel between

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533 'The policy of assimilation contained both a repressive and an inclusionary dimension. The latter consisted of opening the doors of the state to all those who accepted the dominant Turkish identity. This was applicable not just to Kurds but also other Muslim minorities that either hailed from abroad, such as the Bosnians or Circassians, or from Turkey itself, such as the Laz of northeast Black Sea region.' Source for quotation: Barkey, J. Henri. “Under the Gun,” 67.


535 From a discourse analysis perspective, Günes argues that ‘(...) the discourses of the Kurdish activists and political organisations during the 1960s and and early 1970s [provided] the background to the emergence of the 'national liberation discourse' during the mid 1970s.' Cf. Günes, The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Turkey, 4.
(Kurdish) ethnicity and the regional backwardness and poverty in which the majority of Kurds were kept by the Turkish state. This led some currents of Kurdish activism, notably that of the PKK, to assert a more radical, ideology-based agenda to combat both the state's discriminatory policies and some of the powerful Kurdish landlords and tribal shaikhs who were deemed responsible for perpetuating the Turkish polity in the region through the exploitation of their own people in view of their personal and tribal interests.  

**The emergence of the PKK.**

In the words of Abdullah Öcalan, 'On 27 November 1978, in the village of Fis, [Diyarbakır] as an amateur group of 22 individuals, [mostly Kurdish and Turkish university students] we decided to form a Party [the PKK].'  

At its foundation, the latter set up its strategy to create an 'independent, united and democratic Kurdistan,' and has been considered to be the most radical Kurdish movement and opposition force in Turkey to this day. But how did these students arrive there? We can refer to the account given by the early PKK cadres to understand the environment in which they evolved:

>'Initially we were just opposing the system. We started to call ourselves leftists and revolutionaries. The movements in Palestine, Vietnam, Cuba and of course, Turkey were all having a great impact on us. In such a political climate, our Kurdish identity came to the fore: we in fact had a separate language and culture! The Turkish state would not accept the average Kurdish person in society as they were, and [try to force them to conform to standards]. The state would forcefully remove traditional keffiyeh off people's heads in the streets, (...) or confiscate belts worn around traditional trousers. So, you see a State, which is interfering in every aspect of [your life] down to clothing. Naturally, you find it abominable.'

For Van Bruinessen, the choice of Diyarbakır was not a coincidence either. '[s]eeking proximity to the masses, [those students] left the university and went to Eastern Turkey, where they attempted to mobilize disaffected Kurdish youth against tribal and feudal leaders as well as against the state.' From Van Bruinessen's perspective, the new group of Kurdish students devoted themselves, above all, to the idea of liberation from class oppression, and then state oppression. McDowall provides further insight: 'people who

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536 Öcalan, *Kürdistan Devriminin Yolu*, 142.
537 Öcalan, *Bir halkı savunmak*, 331.
had suffered all their lives under the exploitation of rapacious aghas 541 were becoming increasingly resentful of these rich, almost all powerful landlords, 542 and he continues,

'this was already being demonstrated in the unexpected failure of the aghas to continue to deliver the votes of their tenants en bloc to mainstream parliamentary parties. The PKK's raucous intervention, apparently on the side of the poor and dispossessed, was thus a shrewd move that caught the changing social mood in the countryside.' 543

Paul White has offered a similar analysis, insisting on the fact that the PKK demarcated itself from previous Kurdish movements, especially 'by attempting to portray itself as a champion of the most oppressed Kurdish social layers.' 544 Two eminent scholars, Barkey and Fuller, portray the early PKK as 'an unusual phenomenon' among the Kurdish community owing to its left-wing roots. Like White, they also support the hypothesis that 'most other Kurdish parties have emerged from more traditional Kurdish circles with a specific regional and tribal orientation. They represented the least assimilated of the Kurdish populations.' 545 On these grounds, it can be argued that the emergence of the PKK was mostly due to the unresolved economic deprivation and continuing perceived social injustices creating the conditions of a nationalist revolt in the 1970s. 546 From this perspective, until launching a violent insurgency against the Turkish army in the mid-1980s, the PKK may be viewed as carriers of a proto-social movement.

**The rationale behind the PKK's stance.**

The PKK seems to have made no distinction between who they believed to be the perpetuators of state-led oppression, whether it be directly waged by state agents or indirectly by local Kurdish aghas. 547 Ideologically, the PKK had to explain this strategy to the people addressed. This was done by aiming toward the liberation of the Kurdish people, which was stated to be socialist in its desire to restructure Kurdish society, and nationalist

541 *In Kurdistan, within the tribal Kurdish society, “agha” is the title given to tribal chieftains, either supreme chieftains, or to village heads (…) or to wealthy landlords and owners of major real estates in the urban Kurdish centers.’ Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agha_(Ottoman_Empire)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agha_(Ottoman_Empire)


543 Idem.


in its desire to create an independent Kurdish state within a highly religious and tribal Kurdish society. The participants of the PKK emphasized the injustice of the condition of the Kurdish people, seeking alternatives to the dominating Turkish national model, and therefore creating a new sense of Kurdish nationalism.\textsuperscript{548}

The demands for a Kurdish state separate from the Turkish regime were thus initially developed in the late 1970s, and were heavily marked by the leftist and revolutionary aspirations of the era.\textsuperscript{549} In this embryonic period the movement for a separate Kurdish state was heralded by its supporters as a revolutionary obligation, a \textit{pretext} for overthrowing a “recidivist” Turkish regime, which it was believed, did not respect the rights of Kurdish people on its territory. The movement privileged the propagation of a corpus of propaganda among the Kurdish population, the aim of which was to raise the Kurds' awareness on their own deteriorating living conditions due to (a) deliberate discriminatory state policies vis à vis the Kurds and (b) the perpetuation of these policies by the local Kurdish tribal and religious factions and/or elites who exploited the poor in the Kurdish regions of Turkey,\textsuperscript{550} and later those 'Kurds whom it regarded as “collaborators” with the military regime.\textsuperscript{551}

The rationale behind this twofold activity by the movement was a mentality among the Kurdish activists that liberation could not be achieved solely by fighting the external enemy i.e., the Turkish state but rather implied a radical change in the entire internal social order in order to achieve any lasting improvement for the Kurdish population. Should the movement succeed in its struggle, it was thought, it would not only lead to the creation of a Kurdish state, but and more importantly, the Kurdish struggle could become an exemplary case for other people fighting for revolution, be it nationalist or socialist, elsewhere.\textsuperscript{552}

\textsuperscript{548} Casier, Marlies and Jongerden Joost. “Understanding today’s Kurdish movement: Leftist heritage, martyrdom, democracy and gender.” \textit{European Journal of Turkish Studies} [Online], 14 | 2012, Online since 18 January 2013. URL: \texttt{www.ejts.revues.org/4656}


\textsuperscript{550} Bozarslan underlined that the struggle initiated by the Kurds by the late 1970s had a double function: '[O]ne was external, against the state; the other internal to transform Kurdish society.' Cf. Bozarslan, \textit{La question kurde}, 213.

\textsuperscript{551} Van Bruinessen, “Kurdish society, ethnicity, nationalism and refugee problems,” 59.

\textsuperscript{552} For more indigenous sources on the subject: Öcalan, Abdullah. \textit{PKK'de Gelişme Sorunları ve
The grounds were difficult because after the last Kurdish revolts and the Eastern meetings in the 1960s, heavy state measures had remained in force in the region. The Kurds had never been formally educated in their mother tongue, and they were not considered a distinct people of their own. In brief, they were forced to believe that they were Turks. Should they object to that, they faced persecution in one way or another. On one hand, they felt assimilated to the Turks and on the other, they feared persecution.

Gellner once meticulously noted that in order to give rise to a nationalist movement, nationalist sentiments have to be disrupted. In his own words, nationalist sentiments are fueled by the violation of nationalism, a principle, 'which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.' As such, the Kurdish nationalist sentiment was undermined by the lack of a political structure of its own. This created, at least according to early Kurdish activists, the imperative to form a political structure for the Kurdish people. The frustrated Kurdish nationalist sentiment had been reawakened.

It is David Romano who best demonstrated the insufficiency of the social movement theory as applied to the initial phases of the PKK. A social movement is unlikely to occur when the political context in which it operates is closed to its participants. A nationalist movement, however, seems to pass this barrier more comfortably than a social movement by gathering people around a nationalist ideology and convincing them that their mobilization matters. In Romano's view, this is where the PKK's success lay, despite the non-existence of a political structure in its favor. In fact, a Kurdish nationalist movement was able to develop, as far as to adopt guerrilla warfare in 1984, when Turkey fell into chaos following the 1980 military coup, and when the only common agreement of mainstream political parties was not to tackle the Kurdish question on constitutional grounds.

materialized by the still-in-vigor 1982 constitution that restricted most basic freedoms, followed by the Kurdish language ban in 1983, and curiously the historic lack of a unified Kurdish position, backlashed and laid the grounds for a robust Kurdish nationalist movement to emerge and later to become a mass movement. This phenomenon is explained by Kariane Westrheim through the idea that the Kurds had been oppressed for such a long time that 'when PKK took central stage in the 1970s and 80s, [they] were very receptive to a liberation discourse that included terms such as resistance, territory, culture and identity. The Kurdish liberation movement in Turkey carries a strong political message, but it is also a platform for building and marking identity, since demands for freedom to express the groups' cultural identity are articulated through such movements.'

The thusly modern Kurdish nationalist sentiment, since its inception in the 1970s, rejected two main things. The first stems from the cultural, linguistic and religious discrepancies among the Kurds themselves. Thus, emerging Kurdish nationalism in Turkey was particularly self-critical about the disunity of the Kurds as a nation. It was simultaneously critical about how Kurdish nationalist leaders, historically and contemporarily, had failed to overcome the resulting political disunity. Repercussions of this (self-) critical view have been encountered within this study among Kurdish activists.

However, the critique of the Kurdish disunity did not necessarily entail, in the long term, that the different Kurdish movements gather their efforts to achieve a common national objective. Neither did it create a political environment conducive to a constructive debate toward a unified national consensus. Indeed, as time passed and contexts changed, intra-Kurdish agreement became all the more difficult. Van Bruinessen rightly observed that, the once arbitrarily-drawn frontiers which surrounded the Kurds in the region (split between Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran) at the turn of the twentieth century have become “real” over time, separating them on social, cultural, and political scales. In light of this statement, and

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559 It is ironic to note that this criticism is generated by the Kurdish leaders themselves against each other.
560 Fieldwork notes, interviews with Kurdish political party activists, Diyarbakır, Turkey, December 2013.
despite the self-critical approach adopted by Kurdish nationalists, it turns out that nationalism did not have the same meaning for all the members of the Kurdish community, and that nationalism did not lead them down the same political path. It follows that nationalism is not a unifying principle among the Kurds.

Nationalism can be interpreted as a constant battle for control over a people in a specific place against a specific rival. In the Kurdish example, nationalism has several facets and several rivals. As much as it can be interpreted as a battle for control over the Kurds, this battle is not against one but several rivals, internal and external. It follows that within a (national) group there can exist several different nationalist trends, all of which could claim to strive in a direction that is the right one for the people they represent or fight for. In this sense, nationalism looks inwardly as much as it targets outwardly.

In Turkey, the first rivals of the PKK were Kurdish tribal shaikhs, Kurdish aghas and Kurdish “collaborators” of the Turkish state as well as smaller Kurdish political groups, all of which opposed the PKK's ideology. Some of these parties also opposed in later years the military insurgency by the PKK against the Turkish army. Internal rivalry has had a great impact on the perception the Kurds have of their national movement. For instance, one of my interviewees stated that the PKK owes its rise and development to the political elimination of other Kurdish political organizations and parties, which also claimed to represent the Kurds: ‘as the PKK ascended in its struggle, all the other parties were forced

562 Kurdish journalist Günay Aslan is a living witness. He witnessed the emergence of several Kurdish parties and organizations such the DDKD, Özgürlik Yolu, Kawa, and the PKK throughout the 1980s. Aslan shares that in those years he along with his entourage were unsympathetic toward the PKK as they saw it as an “immature” organization, which worshipped violence. He explains that when he finally sympathized with the PKK in 1989, this was partly because of a reaction toward state policies of the time. In fact, the more the Kurds were alienated from the perspective of the Turkish state, the closest ordinary Kurds and those from other political factions were drawn toward the PKK. When Aslan had to escape from Turkey in 1995, he was sentenced to 56 years of imprisonment for the articles and books he authored. He was imprisoned from 1993 to 1995 for his notorious book, 33 Kurşun: yas tutan tarih. Source: Interview with Günay Aslan, Çelik, Sürğün(de) Kürtler, 333.

563 The PKK considered its structures to be progressive and socialist with auxiliary nationalistic overtones. It disapproved of ideologies defended by other Kurdish groups on the grounds that they prevented the advancement of “the cause of revolution.” It could be argued that the PKK applied a Bolshevik interpretation of nationalist theory, whose instigators like Lenin for example, opposed the demands of the working class for autonomy in Eastern Europe under the pretext that it could weaken the socialist movement in its fight against capitalism.

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Externally, the main rival was the Turkish state apparatus.

The second factor rejected by Kurdish nationalists is the stance of the international community regarding the Kurds, refusing to acknowledge them as a nation. The Kurdish movement accused international policy makers, especially the West for deliberately dismissing potential national unity or independence for the Kurds. In the words of Kreyenbroek and Sperl, ‘Kurdish activists argue that on two historic occasions, the Kurds came very close to gaining self-determination, and that in both cases the West was responsible for quashing their hopes. Basically, rather than aligning with the “oppressed” Kurds, foreign states have been financially, politically and militarily supportive of their regional allies represented by the states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and/or Syria on many different occasions. Kurdish activists were convinced that powerful states did not support them, and judged their policies to be “anti-Kurd” as expressed by Beşikçi. This negligence on behalf of international leaders regarding what the Kurds considered to be a profound injustice inflicted a wound to the collective Kurdish conscience. Such shared pain served as fuel to mobilize the Kurds to fight for their rights as a nation. Still today, victimizing discourses, which unfortunately often replace real political projects, are pronounced in order to awaken these emotions and push community members to react and defend nationalistic points of view.

564 Personal recorded interview on 25 December 2013 with a woman activist (teacher by profession) in the premises of this Association in Diyarbakır.


567 In Beşikçi’s view, foreign states do not bear an obligation to consider Kurdish people's “sensibilities” because the Kurds are not an officially represented entity, therefore absent in international, diplomatic meetings.

568 Morad, “The Situation of Kurds in Iraq and Turkey, 124.

569 It is nonetheless possible to counter this argument, considering the Iraqi Kurds who were able to achieve semi-autonomy with the US support after invasion in 2003. However, many analysts also argue that the motives behind that had been US hegemonic ambitions as well as economic interests, which in a way coincided with the Kurds' desire to get rid of a tyrant.
Kurdish civil society as a precursor to the formation of a social movement (post-2000)

In the 1990s, the fight between the Turkish army and the PKK had caught civilians in the crossfire in Turkey's East and Southeast. The region was under a state of siege where extrajudicial killings i.e., state-perpetrated killings and the disappearance of Kurdish civilians had become the order of the day. Kurdish activists were systematically detained and tortured. In an effort to build up their capacity to resist state repression, Kurdish activists prioritized the creation of non-governmental organizations, special-purpose associations and political parties. Still very fresh in my interviewees’ memories, they refer to the 1990s as a time when they managed to create their own institutions, the aim of which was to combat state-deployed violence in all its forms, and disclose human rights abuses committed by state agents both in jails and on the streets against Kurdish activists and civilians. In the words of Fırat Anlı, a member of the Diyarbakır Bar since 1993, 'the 1990s were years of extreme lawlessness. I believe we have fulfilled our duty during those years. If people respect us today, it's because of the resistance during the 1990s.'

This section will focus on the emergence and proliferation of civil society organizations and pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey throughout the 1990s as a preliminary basis for social movement formation post-2000. The Human Rights Association (İHD) opened its Diyarbakır branch in 1991, and since then it has become one of the most important non-governmental organizations to follow a strict framework of human rights in the region. In its general assembly October, 24 1992, the İHD qualified the conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK as a war. It urged compliance with the Geneva Conventions. The İHD prepared policy reports about Kurdish villages that were evacuated and burnt down, while

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570 In terms of internal displacement due to low-conflict war in Kurdish regions, see among others: Yayman, Šark Meselesinden Demokratik Açılma, 229-234.
571 Cemal Babaoğlu documented the story of 12 Kurdish activists, journalists and human rights defenders, originally from the city of Urfa, Turkey who were killed by the “deep state agents” under the Tansu Ciller government at different dates throughout the 1990s. See: Babaoğlu, Cemal. Urfa Kayipları. [The disappeared of Urfa] Istanbul: Gün, 2011.
constantly organizing press conferences in view of a peaceful solution to the Kurdish conflict. Since its foundation, the İHD faced hundreds of court cases against its executives and members and thirteen of its Southeastern branches have been closed down at certain intervals. Covering issues such as the Kurdish question, women's rights, treatment in prisons, torture, violence and forced migration, the İHD gained important experience and insight throughout the 1990s and presents itself as a powerful resource in its outstanding capacity to spearhead large-scale political campaigns post-2000 not only in the Kurdish regions but across the entire country.

Another prominent human rights association in the region has been the Organization of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People (MAZLUM-DER), mostly known for its “neutral” stance in Turkish political arena. MAZLUM-DER declares to fight against discrimination in all its forms and stand beside victims of discrimination irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, religion and political affiliations. MAZLUM-DER incorporates in its body hundreds of activists and volunteers, who engage in active solidarity with the oppressed and deal with the heavy consequences of Kurdish conflict since its inception in 1991. Overall, the activities of both İHD and MAZLUM-DER have created public sensibility, awareness and solidarity vis-à-vis the Kurds within Turkey’s civil society.

The Mesopotamian Cultural Centre (MKM) also deserves attention. Considered to be an authentic collective space, promoting Kurdish culture and identity, it opened its doors in the heart of Istanbul in 1991. For many years the MKM remained an important meeting point for ordinary Kurds and activists, who migrated to Istanbul to escape violence or deteriorating economic conditions in their regions. It is important to note that the MKM suffered from incredible state repression throughout the 1990s including bans, police raids and detention and torture of its executives and members, but kept up Kurdish culture and folklore amongst migrant and displaced Kurds. The MKM turns out to be a powerful and available resource for Kurdish activists to rely upon, particularly in the domain of...
preservation of collective memory, culture and language.  

Alongside the MKM, the Kurdish Institute of Istanbul was founded in Istanbul in 1992. By virtue of its activities in reviving Kurdish literature, language and history, this Institute has contributed to the organizational and human capacity of the Kurdish movement.

The 1990s were also a time during which Kurdish activists developed their own means of media, including a Kurdish TV channel, broadcasting from Belgium since 1994 with local reporters based in the Kurdish regions, and a weekly magazine, Azadiya-Welat, published entirely in the Kurdish language and covering news, politics and culture in Turkey's Kurdish context since 1994 as well.

The origins of Kurdish political party formation date back to the 1990s as well. The first of “pro-Kurdish” political parties was People's Labor Party (HEP), founded in 1990 and represented by 10 deputies in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The main focus of HEP was to end the martial rule in the Kurdish regions, disarm and dissolve 'village militias' there, and pave a safe return home for thousands of displaced villagers. In fact, all pro-Kurdish parties adopted a peaceful discourse in Turkish political life, and the HEP was no exception. However, its Diyarbakır representative Vedat Aydın was killed at the hands of “deep state agents” and many of his other colleagues and fellow party activists.

575 The information on the Mesopotamian Cultural Center (MKM) has been gathered through interviews conducted by myself with the Center's exiled ex-president in June 2013 in Paris, and two Kurdish activists who worked in the Center between 1994 and 1996. The first interview was conducted in June 2013 in Paris and the other two in July and December 2013 in Istanbul and Diyarbakır.


578 In the literature Vedat Aydın's assassination is known to be one of the first extrajudicial killings during the 1990s. http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/imzali-haberler/90larin-ilk-faili-mechulu-vedat-aydin
shared the same destiny in the two years following his assassination. The HEP was closed down in 1993 by the Turkish Constitutional Court and was succeeded by the Democracy Party (DEP), which in turn was closed a year later for purposes of promoting “separatism and Kurdish nationalism.” That same year, four of DEP's deputies in the Turkish Grand National Assembly were sentenced to fifteen years of imprisonment by the Constitutional Court. After DEP's closure, the People's Democratic Party (HADEP) was established in 1994 and survived until 2003 when it was ultimately banned by the Constitutional Court on the grounds that it had backed the PKK. In the meantime, presumably as a political precaution, Kurdish activists had formed a new party in 1997, the Democratic People's Party (DEHAP). It survived until 2005 when it merged itself with the Democratic Society Party.

From their inception in the 1990s, the Kurdish political parties have been excluded several times from Turkish politics as a result of the bans by the Constitutional Court. In this regard, the European Human Rights Court (ECtHR) issued a series of judgments finding Turkey 'to have violated the European Convention on Human Rights in relation to the closure of political parties.' In fact, The ECtHR was and has remained one of the most effective mechanisms for human rights protection in Turkey in general. Litigation at Strasbourg has played a significant role in the development of the Kurdish social movement in the last few decades by establishing the Turkish authorities' responsibility for human rights abuses, extra-judicial killings, disappearances, torture and ill-treatment against the Kurds and for destroying Kurdish rural settlements.  

579 Kurdish activist and writer, Serhat Bucak is a living witness of the events expressed here. He gives details about Vedat Aydin's death and funerals. Cf. Çelik, Sürgün(de) Kürtler, 6-64.


582 The origins of Kurdish litigation in Strasbourg were critically linked to the pioneer experience that had been gained in the Northern Irish context. Advice from UK lawyers who had been involved in human rights litigation was instrumental in motivating Kurdish lawyers and leaders to consider it as a viable strategy. A meeting held in Diyarbakir in 1992 between lawyers from the Human Rights Centre at Essex University, local Kurdish lawyers and the newly established, London-based Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) proved to be a turning point. Source for the quotation: Rights and courts in pursuit of social change. Edited by Dia Anagnostou. Oxford: Hart, 2014. For more information on the cases brought by the KHRP before the ECtHR, see: http://www.khrp.org/litigation-advocacy.html
In the repressive political context of 1990s Turkey, Kurdish political parties served the purpose of organizing and strengthening a collective identity among Kurdish activists and grassroots organizations, by relentlessly resisting against state bans from Ankara and state-deployed repression in the Kurdish regions. As a result of this resistance, they bounced back after each hardship and came up with different names. Kurdish political parties have been an indispensable resource for the organization of Kurdish politics in legal terms, and their very existence has been a valuable asset to political pluralism in the country and for the reinforcement of civil society in general.

To sum up, Kurdish social movement bases owe their beginnings to the spirit of the 1990s, marked by mass protests and resistance by Kurdish grassroots organizations against what is referred to as Turkey's continual “denial and repression” of the Kurds. During those years, the Kurdish activists seemed to be engaged in a battle for survival, many at risk of their lives. In such a context, the human and organizational resources deployed were condemned to a cycle of state repression and popular resistance. However, in the 2000s, they became available resources for Kurdish activists to count on, sustaining solidarity, collective awareness, a shared heritage of activism, perseverance and commitment. These resources which had once served a nationalist purpose became a powerful means to challenge the authorities.

Tilly generally supports the idea that social movements are fluid political processes in which 'innovation, negotiation and conflict' are likely to arise. These processes concern at least two opposing parties that are in constant interaction with each other. The spiral of repression and resistance acted as an impediment to the advancement of a social movement in the Kurdish case, particularly in the 1990s. It also had a negative impact on the general public opinion, which perceived the Kurds as a rebellious separatist group, causing trouble and strife in the country. Others thought, at best, that the Kurds lived in an inner country to

583 Personal recorded interviews with several BDP, DDKD, and İHD activists in their party and association premises in Diyarbakır on 7, 8, 9, 11, 13 and 25 December 2013.
the East, with whom it seemed difficult, if not impossible, to interact or empathize. Conversely, Kurdish activists asserted that the Turkish state with all its army and institutions was the enemy. Enemies are meant to be defeated, and this explains partly how the guerrilla warfare secured substantial support from the local population in many of the Kurdish areas. Notwithstanding, these factors did not instigate open warfare between the Turks and the Kurds, which would have otherwise caused a civil conflict in later years.
CHAPTER FOUR
The Kurdish movement in Turkey functions as a social movement
(2000-2013)

Introduction
Over the last thirty-five years, the Kurdish movement has been engaged both in military insurgency starting from 1984 against the Turkish army (though intermittently) and in legal politics via its politically affiliated organizations and political parties as well as other civil society organizations implemented in Turkey. This period also comprised an important mass mobilization in the Kurdish regions of Turkey beginning in the 1990s, followed by significant integration of the Kurdish population into Turkish political life, especially through the 1999 local elections;\textsuperscript{586} and as a result of cycles of military retreat and (unilateral) ceasefires. By the year 2000, the Kurdish movement's main political discourse, which from the late 1970s had prioritized the creation of a separate Kurdish state, started to change and take the form of advocating democracy and self-determination within the confines of the Turkish republic,\textsuperscript{587} which implied a radical transformation of the Turkish state and of those homogeneous, unitarian foundational principles that had historically rejected the Kurds upon which that state had been built.

The roots of such shift can be traced back to the capture and imprisonment of Abdullah Öcalan by the Turkish authorities in 1999. The same year, from his prison cell in İmralı island, Öcalan dropped the goal for a separate Kurdish state\textsuperscript{588} and replaced it with extensive calls for Turkish and Kurdish unity.\textsuperscript{589} Öcalan argued:

"The demographic distribution of the Kurds and Turks does not lend itself to be suitable for the formation of a separate state or federation. Should the obstacles be removed which prevent equality and the free functioning of democratic institutions,

\textsuperscript{586} In the 1999 local elections the (pro-Kurdish) People's Democratic Party, HADEP won thirty-seven municipalities in the Southeast of Turkey, including seven big provinces such as Diyarbakır, Ağrı, Batman, Bingöl, Hakkâri, Siirt and Van. For more information on the pro-Kurdish legal parties, see: Güney, Aylin. “People’s Democracy Party (HADEP).” In Political Parties in Turkey, edited by Barry M. Rubin and Metin Heper: 122-137. London: Frank Cass, 2002.

\textsuperscript{587} Akkaya, and Jongerden, “Reassembling the Political,” 2012.


\textsuperscript{589} Öcalan, Savunmalarım, 64.
[we] shall revert to more healthy solutions, reinforcing [our] unity.¹⁵⁹⁰

He furthermore stated:

'There is no material basis and benefit [to pursue] a separate state. A state may be claimed, but it would be the weakest option in terms of practicality. Even if it were to be formed, it would not be recognized by a neighbor, nor would it achieve recognition in the international arena. A state needs economy, a language, social unity and a defense [system] in order to sustain itself as an independent state. [A Kurdish state] would not last a day. If the Kurds in Northern Iraq cannot achieve full autonomy despite having secured full external support, the reason behind this has to be understood internally [i.e., the Kurds are not a united entity]. The option for an independent Kurdish state cannot go beyond rhetoric.'¹⁵⁹¹

It is important to note, however, that despite the gradual shift in the Kurdish movement's aspirations from a separate state to the integration of the Kurdish people into a common democratic ground within Turkey, there was no immediate change in the policies of the Turkish state or in public opinion toward the Kurds. Furthermore, that the Kurdish movement had, by 2000, embraced an advocacy for democracy and fraternity between Kurds and Turks, did not mean that the movement, from then on, deployed only democratic or legislative means to achieve its aims. Such tension between the discourse and practice of the movement has become highly determinant and difficult to overcome, hence the persistence of Kurdish guerrilla forces in parts of Turkey and semi-autonomous Kurdish regions of Iraq as well as the continuation of Turkish military operations in the region and arrests of Kurdish political activists by the Turkish state.¹⁵⁹²

However, despite tension and its ensuing consequences, especially in the last fifteen years, there have been palpable signs of a robust social movement in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, advocating legal politics, non-violent protest and civil disobedience to achieve its aims, and in which large numbers of people have been keen to engage. It is precisely this development which will constitute the central claim to my argument in this chapter. Rather

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¹⁵⁹⁰ Öcalan, Savunmalarım. 65-66. (My translation from Turkish)
¹⁵⁹¹ Öcalan. Savunmalarım. 64. (My translation from Turkish)
than examining the contemporary Kurdish movement and politics only through the prism of nationalist or ethno-nationalist activity.\textsuperscript{593} I will place their dynamics within a framework of social movements.

Nationalism and ethnicity alone fall short of explaining these dynamics. The fact that the Kurds started to express their wish to live with their fellow Turkish citizens within the existing Turkish state (under the condition of constitutional changes) is antithetical to the idea of strictly ethnic nationalism. Furthermore, the Kurdish movement's integrationist facet is also different from secessionism and more traditionally-conceived national independence agendas. Therefore, it appears feasible to decipher the dynamics of the Kurdish movement within its Turkish context through three of the main pillars of social movement theory, namely: political opportunity structures, resource mobilization and collective identity. I approach the Kurdish movement on account of its both conventional styles of political participation and public protest, which I was able to observe during fieldwork and analyze through primary and wide media sources. Through these actions, mainly ordinary people have engaged in concerted efforts with the aim of altering aspects of their society by using the formal institutions and informal networks at their disposal.\textsuperscript{594}

In this light, I will raise the importance of shifting political opportunities for Turkey's Kurds between 2000 and 2013. Second, I will analyze how Kurdish activists perceive these opportunities and mobilize their resources in order to further capitalize on them. And third, I will discuss the articulations of collective identity in the development of a social movement in the Kurdish context.


The political environment surrounding the Kurdish movement: 
  a political process approach

Both external and internal factors played a decisive role in Turkey's inclination toward more democracy from the early 2000s. Having been granted a full candidate status to the European Union (EU) in 1999, Turkey started to align with the harmonization packages proposed by the EU in view of democratization, particularly in areas such as civil rule and human rights. From 2001 onward, extensive constitutional changes were made in the Turkish constitution with the purpose of “civilizing” it and efforts to further amend the Turkish constitution have been pursued by a four-party parliamentary commission, including the Kurdish parliamentary block in later years. I argue that these shifts in Turkish politics have led to a more flexible environment for Kurdish activists – as organized political actors with resources – to pursue an agenda of their own, mainly through elections, parliamentary deliberations and collective demonstrations.

This demonstrates that the Kurdish movement has seized on these political opportunities, figuring out the possibility to work out their agendas within a fluctuating political system without renouncing to their Kurdish identity, but releasing the goal for statehood. To the extent that even the Kurdish peace process, launched in 2013 between jailed Kurdish leader Öcalan, the PKK and Turkish authorities, can be seen as the outcome of the relative opening of Turkish political and judicial system and Kurdish activists' capitalizing on the opportunities that derived from this. I suggest that in the Kurdish context, opportunities are not fixed assets but rather a compelling process of contradictions, rivalry and negotiations.

595 The EU's promising announcement of Turkish candidacy for full membership had meant fulfilling the Copenhagen political criteria with the most controversial conditions consisting of abolishing the death penalty, eradicating police torture, and granting cultural rights to the Kurds. Source for quotation: Piran, Leila. Institutional Change in Turkey: the Impact of European Union Reforms on Human rights and Policing. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. p.78
596 Piran, Institutional Change in Turkey, 51.
597 Some analysts have even argued that 'AK Party's 2023 plan and the documents that lay out its vision for what needs to be done in 63 articles overlap with Öcalan's strategy about the resolution of the Kurdish question (voiced during Newroz 2013). In this sense, there are many similarities between Öcalan's proposal for a confederation for the Middle East and AK Party's neo-Ottomanism.' Source for quotation: Tek, Mesut. “Süreç mutlaka seffaf yürütülmelidir.” [The process ought to be transparent.] Deng no: 93 Sept. 2013: 4-8. (My translation from Turkish)
598 For example, Tezcür interestingly argued that the democratization process led the PKK to radicalize its...
An important dimension to be considered in a social movement is the political context within which it occurs.\textsuperscript{599} A state may be democratic, semi-democratic or authoritarian. Whether a regime is authoritarian or tolerant vis à vis its opponents plays a crucial role on the rise, growth or decline of social movements. A regime qualifies to be authoritarian or \textit{de-democratized},\textsuperscript{600} especially when the voice of its opponents has been depicted as “illegitimate” and coerced, in which case social movements are doomed to wane.\textsuperscript{601} Conversely, in order for social movements to develop and spread, open and flexible political environments prove more conducive. The concept of a flexible political environment, which would facilitate diverse groups to mobilize in opposition to an established authority is therefore more likely within a (semi-) democracy where protestors are not treated as criminals but rather as opponents.

Theorists of the political process approach further assert that a social movement's chance of success also depends on the opportunities resulting from political shifts within a state's institutional structure.\textsuperscript{602} In the literature, such moments are defined through relative waning of state repression e.g., following the adoption of certain reform packages or cleavages among the elites.\textsuperscript{603} In addition, external phenomena might impact a state's domestic politics as well, such as wars, regional transformations or the international agreements that a state has come to abide by. My case study concerns all of these aspects and precisely deals with:


I borrow this term from Tilly. He defines de-democratization through three main processes: ‘external conquest, defection from the democratic compact of elite political actors (…), and economic crisis so acute that it undercuts the state's capacity to sustain itself and deliver on its commitments.’ Source for quotation: Tilly, Charles. \textit{Democracy}. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. p.174-175


First, the lessening of traditional Turkish state repression in the period post-2000 (as a double-sided phenomenon): This can be explained by two main factors. First, it is the Kurdish movement's perseverance in opposing the Turkish state which ultimately forced the latter to revise its coercive methods and perhaps find a more constructive way to deal with the Kurdish question. My interviewees insist on this point. Second, Turkey's EU accession procedures intensified after 2002 having overall a positive impact on the process of democratization in Turkey.604

Second, sharp cleavages between the ruling AK Party and the Turkish military: From 2000 onward, these cleavages resulted in the military's loss of power in civil politics and the curbing of mainstream Kemalists. Turkey's chronic state codes have thusly been disturbed forever. Let us note that the Kurds had been denied their basic rights under several military Kemalist regimes throughout the past century.

Third, the great impact of regional upheavals in 2011 on Turkey: On one hand, the waves of the Arab spring pushed Turkey to overhaul its domestic policies, particularly regarding the Kurds, while on the other it inspired the Kurds to keep up their efforts to seek a status quo change sparked by the bigger regional picture.

On these grounds, most of the components of an operational political process approach are present in the Kurdish example. The sole nuance is that the dynamics of the Kurdish movement that had prevailed pre-2000 can never be totally dismissed. It should also be added that, to an important extent, Kurdish activists were able to build their own windows of opportunity on the basis of their past experiences of activism and national resistance.

The lessening of traditional state repression.
When the AK Party came to power in 2002 with 34,4 percent of general votes, it promised to work toward Turkey's integration into the EU as a major foreign policy objective at the

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national scale.\textsuperscript{605} Indeed, in the following years, Turkey adopted some of the Copenhagen political criteria, particularly in realms of civil rule, human rights and legislation of new domestic reforms through a series of eight reform packages. These reforms resulted in amelioration of freedom of speech, the transformation of civil and military relations, the abolition of the death penalty (which Öcalan benefited from)\textsuperscript{606} and the legalization of radio and television broadcasting in Kurdish language. Nil Satana among others, draws attention to the importance of recognition in terms of language and cultural rights, albeit limited, that have usually been the source of violence in Turkey.\textsuperscript{607}

On 30 July 2002 Ankara's centralized state of emergency protocols (in Turkish \textit{Olaganüstü Hal}, OHAL) over thirteen Kurdish provinces in the East and Southeast of Turkey were terminated. In 2005, the then prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared in a speech in Diyarbakır that 'the Kurdish problem is not only a problem of the Kurds but of all Turkey.'\textsuperscript{608} This speech is considered to be the basis of the \textit{Kurdish opening} launched in 2009 by the AK Party government with its stated aim to further improve the rights of Turkey's citizens of Kurdish origin, and possibly end the thirty-year conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK:

'The Kurdish Opening is intended to be a comprehensive, multi-tiered policy approach to resolving tensions between the Turkish government and Turkey’s Kurdish population. Although not all details of the Kurdish Opening have been made public, (…) [t]he first of these measures includes allowing Kurdish prayers in Kurdish mosques and officially changing the Turkish name of some Kurdish cities back to Kurdish. The second phase of the opening likely involves granting amnesty to PKK militants. The final and most difficult phase comprises a constitutional amendment redefining Turkish citizenship to be less ethnically based and allowing

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\textsuperscript{605} In the words of Entessar, 'Turkey's desire to become integrated into broader Europe and eventually join the European Union also has some unintended consequences for reforming some of the country's more draconian legal restrictions.' Cf. Entessar, Nader. \textit{Kurdish Politics in the Middle East}. Lanham: Lexington, 2010. p.147. See also: Kubicek, Paul. “Democratization and Relations with the EU in the AK Party Period: Is Turkey Really Making Progress?” \textit{Insight Turkey}, Vol. 15. No. 4 (Fall 2013) p. 41-49. Accessed at: \url{http://file.insightturkey.com/Files/Pdf/04_kubicek_3_w.pdf}

\textsuperscript{606} Turkey officially abolished death penalty as part of its third harmonization package with the European Union in 2002. It is important to recognize here the crucial role played by the ECtHR in keeping Öcalan alive. For more on this, see, among others: Eralp, Doğa U. “Turkish democracy during the EU process: Demilitarization and Resecuritization.” In \textit{The Great Catalyst – European Union Project and Lessons from Greece and Turkey}, edited by Bülent Temel, 319-339. Lanham: Lexington, 2014. p.327


\textsuperscript{608} My translation from Turkish. This speech is available on YouTube: \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5D1ezOOW7w}
\end{footnotesize}
Kurdish language classes to be taught in schools.\textsuperscript{609}

If we extend the political process framework, it can be argued that the shifts in the Kurdish movement's objective i.e., achieving equal grounds with Turks within the confines of the Turkish state coincided with the aforementioned declarations and the softening of draconian Turkish state policies post-2000. Kurdish activists in Turkey saw this as an opportunity to raise their voice stronger than before, but this time mainly by democratic means. Their argument was that if Turkey aspires to be part of the EU, then Kurds ought to be granted constitutional rights as in any modern democratic state. While conducting fieldwork, I observed that the Kurds ardently supported the idea of Turkey's accession to the EU and the efforts provided in that direction.\textsuperscript{610}

Let us remember that in the 1990s thousands of Kurdish activists were killed at the hands of the Turkish state; thousands of entire Kurdish villages were burnt down by the Turkish army under the pretext to discourage locals from sheltering PKK guerrillas; and the Kurdish language remained banned from public use, not to mention the words 'Kurd' and 'Kurdistan'.\textsuperscript{611} However, there was a substantial revision in these policies, particularly following the 2002 national elections. Rather than executing Kurdish activists, they were often imprisoned. The ban on the use of Kurdish language was lifted and henceforth allowed to be taught in private schools. During a visit to Diyarbakır in 2013, Erdoğan uttered the word, Kurdistan, in a public speech referring to Iraqi Kurdistan.\textsuperscript{612} These


\textsuperscript{610} In this regard, they were also equally cautious about Turkey collaborating with regional actors and states, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, something to which my interviewees profoundly oppose. This observation is based both on my fieldwork notes during a focus group conducted by myself on 6 December 2013, in the premises of DiAY-DER, and my recorded personal interviews with influential members of Diyarbakır's diverse Chambers of Commerce, Architects and Engineers on 23 and 24 December 2013 in their offices.

\textsuperscript{611} The Kurdish Human Rights Project has reports pertaining to human rights issues in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Caucasus since 1992. For thorough information about general human rights abuses and violations in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, both past and present-day, consult: www.khrp.org/khrp-news/human-rights-documents/impact-reports.html

\textsuperscript{612} “Başbakan Erdoğan Diyarbakır'da konuştu” [Prime Minister Erdogan spoke in Diyarbakır] Milliyet
revisions (and many more) sufficed to generate a more conducive environment for the rise of a Kurdish social movement in Turkey's post-2000 context. It gradually took the form of a movement of fierce opposition against the government to the extent that both their agendas for the resolution of the Kurdish question competed with one another, creating parliamentary, political and publicized tension.

**Developments in the balance of power: changing civil-military relations.**

Historically, Turkey has been marked by military tutelage. Whenever the country faced political crisis, armed forces intervened. Military interventions were staged every decade, namely in 1960, 1971 and 1980.613 In the words of the political scientist White,

> 'the armed forces have considered themselves [Turkish Republic's] guardian. (…) the praetorian political doctrine that began with Kemal Atatürk himself – asserts that the military has both the right and the responsibility to intervene in affairs of state, when absolutely necessary in order to guarantee the system's continuance.'

Each coup was preceded by martial law and followed by state of emergency protocols fueling further social unrest and economic instability. Although a civilian government would be restored by the military after each takeover, this would only happen after civil rights had been heavily damaged. In all this turmoil, the republic-old Kurdish question would constantly be considered an issue of terror, approached and dealt with under harsh security measures.

The power thusly held by military generals in Turkey has been the best indicator of domestic and militaristic status quo in effect since the foundation of the republic in 1923. When the European Council qualified Turkey as a potential candidate in 1999, their condition was that Turkey redefines the role of its military in civil politics.615 In this regard,

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614 White, *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers?,* 130.

615 In the words of Gunter, 'until the recent EU reforms mandated by Turkey's EU candidacy and the enormous AKP electoral victory over determined military opposition in July 2007 gave civilian authorities more control, (…) often served as the ultimate source of authority in Turkey.' Cf. Gunter, M. Michael. “Turkey, Kemalism, and the 'Deep State.’” In *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria,* edited by David Romano and Mehmet Gurses: 17-40. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. p.20
İsmet Akça and Evren Balta-Paker consider that there have been three specific moments in which civil-military relations underwent radical transformations. The first is between 2002 and 2005 during which the AK Party attempts to reduce military power in civil politics, mainly according to the EU requirements. The second is between 2005 and 2007. This period is qualified by the authors as one of reversal as 'the AK Party seems to converge with the military on key political issues.' The third is from 2007 and onward. Two important trials of military generals take place, known as the Ergenekon and the Balyoz trials. These result in the curbing of the military's hand in civil politics in definite terms. Thereafter, a balance of power is believed to be established between the military and the civil government.

Curtailing military power in Turkey can be seen as a revolutionary breakthrough. In BBC analyst Güney Yıldız's words: 'The Ergenekon trial and the legal reforms around it have brought to an end the Kemalist model of checks and balances between different pillars of authority within Turkey.' The Ergenekon and Balyoz trials, despite their shortcomings and perhaps limited scope to deal with all military activities in question, are 'a sign that anti-democratic forces, many of whom date back to the final years of the Ottoman empire, have no longer free reign.'

On another note, Akça and Balta-Paker point out that since Öcalan had already been captured by the Turkish authorities by the time of Turkey-EU negotiations, this might have strongly underpinned the initial will of the government to soften its Kurdish policies now that they believed they had defeated the PKK with its leader imprisoned.


“The “Ergenekon” network, uncovered in June of 2007, is allegedly a network of military members and civilians who conspired to create chaos in society, laying the groundwork for and then justifying a coup to overthrow the Justice and Development Party government. Documents gathered in the Ergenekon-related investigation revealed that the organization was originally established to act within the Turkish Armed Forces, but re-organized itself in 1999 expanding its scope to include civilian elements as well. Around 200 suspects, including retired generals and colonels as well as academics and journalists have been or are currently being tried for being a member of the organization. A similar and more-recently uncovered case involves the arrests of 49 retired and active duty officers (including two force commanders and a deputy chief of staff) for conspiring to overthrow the Turkish government in 2003 as part of an alleged plan named “Sledgehammer.”’ Source for quotation: Kaya, Ms. Karen, Contractor For The Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, Ks 66027. Changing Civil Military Relations in Turkey (April 2011): 1-15. Apr. 2011. Accessed May 2013. http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Civil-Military-Relations-in-Turkey.pdf

For a general analysis, see: Akça, and Balta-Paker, “Beyond Military Tutelage?” 2013.


Esayan, Markar. “Ergenekon: An Illegitimate Form of Government.” Insight Turkey 15.4 (Fall 2013): 29-
historical viewpoint, the Kurdish position vis-à-vis the gradual dismantling of military power in civil politics was somewhat puzzling. Kurdish representatives, party leaders and other influential personalities in legal platforms opted a rather ambiguous stance and did not quite engage with the government in its efforts to curb the military. At least two factors could explain this phenomenon. The first is the fact that the AK Party government was the one who spearheaded such an initiative and the Kurds seemed to find no interest mingling with the AK Party government especially for political, electoral and other pragmatic calculations. The second was more a question of mistrust in the state apparatus as a whole. Nothing suggested that Kurdish politicians would have more faith in judiciary than military institutions.

That said, many Kurdish activists on the ground followed the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials closely, and demanded deeper investigation into the role of army generals in the instruction of what are known to be extra-judicial killings of the 1990s, martial law policies as well as the entrenchment of illegal state agents in the region that committed “atrocities” against civilians. From a social movement perspective, this was a time when Kurdish activists were able to denounce the militaristic past and character of the Turkish state without being targeted by the military.

The extent to which Turkey has moved toward a democratic governance of civil-military relations remains an open debate. In this section however, it is important to recognize that these relations have undergone radical transformations between 2002 and 2007. The memorable sign of this is that the traditionally dominant role of Turkish armed forces in politics since 1960 is no longer tenable. With the initiation of EU reforms that aimed at democratizing civil-military relations followed by a series of judicial investigations against military officials for their role in planning to overthrow civilian governments, the military lost its “legal” immunity and, in a way, its hitherto “uncontested” political authority as well as reliability in the eyes of the public. According to Yaprak Gürsoy's statistical survey on

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622 Akça and Balta-Paker assert that the AK Party is the first civilian party to challenge the militaristic foundations of the Turkish state to such extent.
the perceptions of the Turkish public opinion about civil-military relations in Turkey there is evidence that the Turkish public has less faith in Turkish army than before following the so-called Ergenekon/Balyoz trials. To Gürsoy, low levels of public trust regarding the army may prevent the attempt for potential military coups or a military tutelage to take hold in the future in Turkish politics. The fact that top army generals can be judged means that institutionally there exists support for democracy, even though the future of this democracy remains debatable in terms of its consolidation. From a political process perspective, these developments translated into crucial political opportunities for Kurdish activists to operate within a less militaristic environment, marking therefore a power shift from military to civilian rule on key issues such as the Kurdish question.

**The regional balance of power shifted with the Arab spring.**

As the Arab spring rolled on from 2011 onward, Turkey assigned itself a mission or in any case, was driven in that direction to become a model for democracy in the entire region. This forced Turkey to reconsider its foreign policy with neighbors as well as to overhaul its relations with the Kurds domestically. However, Turkey's own flaws in human rights protection and democracy soon overshadowed the viability of such ambitions to become a regional role model. The relevance of the Arab spring within this study is double in that Turkey had to reconsider both its foreign and domestic policies.

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624 Gürsoy, “Turkish Public Attitudes toward the Military.” 2012.
626 This missionary role is not a new phenomenon. It has its roots in the ideology of *Millî Görüş* (National Vision), an Islamo-political organization, which attributes Turkey a leading mission over all Muslim communities. Bora, Tanlı. *Türk Sağının Üç Hali: Milliyetçilik, Muhafazakarlık, Islamcilik.* [Three Forms of Turkish Right: Nationalism, Conservatism, Islamism] Istanbul: Birikim, 2014.
627 In a talk given at King's College London, Turkish ambassador to London, Ahmet Ünal Çeviköz said that Turkey does not intend to become a model in the Middle East: 'Arab democratization might take several decades. Turkey is not playing for the leadership but is sharing experiences of democracy only.' Çeviköz, Ahmet Ünal. “Turkish Influence in the Middle East: An Opportunity for the EU?” Lecture given at Strand, King's College London, January 24, 2012.
same time, the regional status quo change instigated by regional upheavals gave the Kurds in Turkey the conviction to insist in protest to achieve their rights. A Kurdish version of the Arab spring quickly materialized during instances of civil disobedience and mass protests in the Kurdish regions of Turkey.

On 24 March 2011, in a move inspired by uprisings that swept across the Middle East and North Africa, the head of Turkey's prominent Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), in a joint conference held in conjunction with several other Kurdish organizations and groups in the region, announced the start of a campaign of civil disobedience, beginning with all-night sit-in demonstrations and general strikes in the predominantly Kurdish city of Diyarbakır in Southeast Turkey. The statement indicated that there were to be people 'out in the streets until their demands [were] met, using completely democratic and peaceful methods in their actions.' This period can be qualified as the beginning of a total social movement spearheaded by Kurdish activists that spanned over into the peace talks in 2013 and beyond (this will be discussed in the next chapter).

A BDP deputy has informed this study in retrospect that 'it was incredible how Kurdish activists on the ground were able to respond to what was happening in and outside of their country' converging their own campaigns of protest with the inspiration taken from the Arab uprisings elsewhere. 'Upon our call,' he continued, 'large numbers of people participated in public meetings, rallies, petition drives, strikes and vigils,' evoking Tilly's famous synthesis of social movements, which are 'campaigns of collective claims on target authorities (...) and array of claim-making performances [including all of the aforementioned and more]' with unity, numbers and commitment on the part of the constituencies. Subsequently, it seemed that the streets became the place where “real” politics were shaped. Nevertheless, I would suggest that ironically, those campaigns of collective claims in the Kurdish case seemed to be a top-down strategy (cf. 'upon our call')

631 “[Civil Disobedience Starts off tomorrow in Diyarbakır]” BIA News Agency, 2011.
633 Personal written interview with a BDP deputy on 25 July 2013 in Istanbul, Turkey.
working quite impressively on the Kurdish grassroots.

Let us remember that for many decades of Kurdish history, popular uprisings have been a mechanism of choice. A number of Kurdish protest movements – taking the form of both peaceful protest and armed struggle – emerged during the twentieth century, particularly in Turkey, in an attempt to obtain official recognition of the Kurdish identity. However, following the regional upheavals that essentially characterized the year 2011, new and evolving forms of Kurdish popular protest have emerged in Turkey. What actually made the difference was not only the belief in the capacity of ordinary people to topple an existing political order. Indeed, high praise from the international community, qualifying the Arab spring movements as “legitimate” and “inspirational” gave the Kurds the confidence that they had been on the right track, and that all favorable conditions were set to announce their own “ongoing and legitimate spring” to the world.\textsuperscript{634} Scholars, when discussing the repercussions of the Arab spring in other areas, repeatedly pointed out that ‘the Kurds are already highly experienced in making politics through “serhildan,” equivalent to the Arab concept of “intifada.”’\textsuperscript{635} By the end of the spring of 2011, the so-far “Kurdish struggle” was henceforth termed as “the Kurdish spring,” altering significantly the political linguistic terminology employed by both Kurdish activists as well as those with expertise on the Kurdish question.\textsuperscript{636}

In the days and months that followed the BDP's call to protest, police clashed with demonstrators who had gathered in Diyarbakır. This situation was echoed in many other major Kurdish cities in the region, leaving what was estimated to be more than 2,000 people detained and many more injured.\textsuperscript{637} It is important to point out that this series of protests continued after the general national elections held on 12 June 2011 in Turkey, and

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\textsuperscript{637} Landon, “Kurds Renew Their Movement,” 2011.
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that Kurdish representatives called for similar kinds of collective and political action. The non-violent civil disobedience path that the Kurds so took on in the immediate aftermath of the Arab revolutions to support their own political agenda, placed within the inclusive framework of a demand for constitutional rights confirms that they captured the spirit of the time. When such a group of people manages to sustain its struggle for the recognition of its identity rights over decades, and manages to do so in the political atmosphere of the Middle East, it is quite unsurprising to observe that they are capable of recognizing and capitalizing on regional political (im)balance.

On the basis of the BDP's call for civil disobedience in spirit of the Arab spring, Kurdish protesters' demands in Turkey centered on political and constitutional rights can be interpreted as analogous to demands made in neighboring Middle Eastern countries. In both cases, common grievances included frustration with the status quo; the perceived brutality of the state's security apparatus; and the severe lack of economic transparency.

Taken in their context and formulated more precisely, frustration with the status quo formed four main pillars of the protest in the Kurdish case. The first was the demand for the right to education in their mother tongue. The Kurdish language was banned in Turkey until 1991, and while the prohibition of spoken Kurdish was lifted by President Turgut Özal thereafter, it remained illegal in courts, public places or for the purpose of naming children. Despite partial improvements, the Kurdish language has not yet been bestowed with an official status. Second, a specific campaign was carried out for the elimination of the 10 percent election threshold in Turkey, which represents an “indirect restriction” on democratic representation of different political parties and tendencies in the country. For the majority

642 The Kurdish parties chose to take part in the 2011 elections with independent candidates. They succeeded in this strategy, which then enabled them to form a parliamentary group in the Turkish Assembly.
of Kurds, this anti-democratic system is part of the status quo, 'an artifact of the 1980 military coup.'\textsuperscript{643} The Kurds therefore lobbied for the elimination or the lowering of the election barrier during their campaign of civil disobedience for a stronger participatory democracy in Turkey, beyond a strict identity-politics framework. Third, protesters demanded the release of thousands of political prisoners,\textsuperscript{644} who were prosecuted in view of their alleged “separatist” activities or affiliations, with little legal foundation. Fourth and finally, Kurdish demonstrators pursued in every public gathering to be rid of as much of the status quo as possible and urged for radical constitutional reforms in Turkey.

The brutality of the state's security apparatus has been experienced by different categories of people in the Kurdish regions of Turkey. State-deployed violence in mass demonstrations in major cities in Southeast Turkey were comparable to the scenes of brutality in Tahrir Square. Military operations against the Kurdish guerrilla which highly disrupted the stability of daily life for the inhabitants of mountainous or border areas recalled the severe militarization felt by the inhabitants of certain Syrian cities. The increase in “arbitrary” political arrests of Kurdish activists deepened the gap between the Kurds and the Turkish state. Overall, the civil disobedience and general strikes condemned state violence and called for an end to Turkish military operations in the region.

The severe lack of economic transparency and economic opportunities in the Kurdish regions of Turkey is one of the consequences of the armed conflict that has been going on for over thirty years between the Turkish military and the PKK. Serious social and economic problems persist. According to the Turkish Statistics Institute (TurkStat), the highest national unemployment rates in 2009 were found in two Kurdish provinces: Diyarbakır with 20.6 percent and Hakkari with 19.7 percent.\textsuperscript{645} Within the last few years, in the city of Diyarbakır alone, five thousand households had been diagnosed unable to afford a daily meal.\textsuperscript{646} These issues have been worth being brought up, especially through

\textsuperscript{643} Research Turkey (November, 2012), “Mr. Hasip Kaplan (BDP Deputy) Interview: Kurdish Problem and Being the Voice of the ‘Others’”, Vol. I, Issue 9, pp.21-26, Centre for Policy and Research on Turkey (ResearchTurkey), London, Research Turkey. \url{http://researchturkey.org/?p=2303}

\textsuperscript{644} I refer to KCK arrests here, which will be examined in the next section.

\textsuperscript{645} My source is the Turkish Statistical Institute website, also available in English: \url{http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/Start.do}

\textsuperscript{646} This information has been provided to me by the president of Sarmaşık Association in a personal recorded interview on 16 December 2013 in his office in Diyarbakır, Turkey.
fieldwork, because when it comes to the Kurdish question, nationalist-oriented or politically-motivated agendas usually dominate the general public debate and policy, while much less attention is given to regional unemployment scores, lack of infrastructure in Kurdish-populated areas as well as marginal investments and low urbanization rates therein. However, economic issues have clearly incubated many of the social challenges in the Kurdish regions. And, aside from pure identity-based claims, poverty and the lack of job opportunities and infrastructure have been hidden factors driving Kurdish activists and youth into collective action.
The resource mobilization approach in the Kurdish case

In a social movement, social actors must perceive the opportunities that open up to them and perhaps match best with their goals by using resources they have already in place. These resources consist, for the most part, of existing social, organizational and associational networks and can be considered as 'social movement bases' to borrow Tilly's terminology. In fact, every social movement largely depends on these bases when specializing in collective claim-making.\textsuperscript{647} I apply resource mobilization theory i.e., the activation of movement bases through formal and informal organizations and stress on how preexisting and new resources e.g., political parties, civil society organizations and special-purpose associations, have helped Kurdish activists build a long-lasting social movement in their particular political context.\textsuperscript{648}

As outlined in the first chapter, the resource mobilization theory asserts that social movements emerge when people are able to mobilize certain resources to end their common grievances. The theory pays attention to the organizational, material and human resources that are available to social movement participants from the inception of their movement. These include money, skills, knowledge, human rights organizations, political parties, clubs, religious space as well as external factors such as financial or moral support and sympathy coming from the outside world. Activists who lack resources have difficulty engaging a collective action even if windows of opportunities open up to them. Therefore, resources are considered a formative base upon which collective action is able to develop, if not to emerge in the first place. The strength of resource mobilization theory is that resources and the ability to mobilize them determine what social movements can or cannot achieve and perhaps why every discontent does not turn into a social movement.

In this section I draw on McAdam's theory in that existent organizations in a community 'are the primary source of resources facilitating movement emergence. These groups constitute the organizational context in which insurgency is expected to develop. As

\textsuperscript{647} Tilly, \textit{Contentious Performances}, 119.

\textsuperscript{648} In the case of long lasting social movements it can be argued that movements tend to modify their initial discourse along the way. The Kurdish movement in Turkey opted for strategic changes in its discourse for mobilization. These changes imply a challenge vis à vis the participants or supporters of a movement who need to be persuaded of the new goal in every stage of the claim-making.
such, their presence is as crucial to the process of movement emergence as a conducive political environment. Indeed, in the absence of this supportive organizational context, the aggrieved population is likely to be deprived of the capacity for collective action even when confronted with a favorable structure of political opportunities. If one lacks the capacity to act, it hardly matters that one is afforded the chance to do so.\textsuperscript{649}

My own contribution to resource mobilization theory is that the Kurds are highly aware of the resources they possess, which is a further asset for groups engaging in a social movement to persevere. Throughout fieldwork I frequently took note of interviewees expressing how 'the Kurds are the most politicized and organized people in the entire region with significant resources at their disposal, rooted in a history of collective resistance.'\textsuperscript{650} On one hand, this statement shows the power of \textit{imagined} political communities, as Anderson sees them 'to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined.'\textsuperscript{651} On the other hand, it shows that the Kurdish community stays attached to its past while taking pride in its present, and because of the permanent character of their movement they seem to be highly confident in that they have achieved an organizational capacity, which offers them a margin for maneuver against their adversaries.

\textit{Applied to my case study.}

The resource mobilization theory focuses on the resources mobilized by Kurdish activists, believed to underpin most of the collective action processes within the contemporary Kurdish movement. Civil society organizations and political parties operating in the Kurdish regions owe their beginnings to Kurdish political activities throughout the 1990s. It turns out that the resources they created in those years paid off increasing their capacity for action post-2000 and making them wedges not just for the resolution of the Kurdish conflict but Turkey's democratization in general.

Human Rights Association’s (İHD) Diyarbakır branch, which was established in 1991, was able to carry out large-scale campaigns post-2000. Four of the most notable of these were: \textit{Freedom of Expression} in 2001, \textit{Abolition of Death Penalty} in 2002, and \textit{Don't Remain}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[650] This expression has come up time and time again throughout the entire fieldwork.
\end{footnotes}
Silent Against Torture in 2004.\textsuperscript{652} Studying the movement of the Niger Delta activists, Eghosa Osaghae had asserted that human rights activism is fundamental for the realization of a social movement because the 'allegations and perceptions of discrimination, exclusion, oppression, injustice, domination, and exploitation, (...) all arise from denials and violations of human rights (…)'.\textsuperscript{653} Let us recall that thirteen of İHD's leading members were killed by the Turkish security forces in the Kurdish regions, deeply affecting the sentiments and trajectory of thousands of other militants involved in human rights activities ever since.\textsuperscript{654} It can be argued that the coherence of the Kurdish social movement was partly dependent on the ability of Kurdish activists within the İHD, who carried with themselves memories of a dramatic past, to persevere and earn both national and international recognition, particularly from the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) for the works accomplished and continued to be initiated to this day.

From the perspective of opportunity structures in Turkey's Kurdish context, the EU's pressure on Turkey to become more democratic cannot be separated from the commitment of human rights activists in the Kurdish regions to expose human rights abuses they face onto the international arena. From the perspective of the resource mobilization theory, İHD can be seen an internal resource (a place and a framework) for Kurdish activists to mobilize and a means to influence the public opinion to ensure broader support. Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to think of the İHD as one of the principal resources that Kurdish activists cling to.

MAZLUM-DER, founded in the early 1990s, can also be placed within the framework of the resource mobilization theory by virtue of its growing organizational capacity,

\textsuperscript{652} Further information and details can be found on İHD's website available in Turkish, \url{www.org.tr} under the rubric \textit{Kampanyalar} [Campaigns|İHD's]. Also see, Altan-Olcay, Özlem and Icduygu, Ahmet. “Mapping Civil Society in the Middle East: The Cases of Egypt, Lebanon and Turkey.” \textit{British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies}, 39:2 (2012): 157-179 URL: \url{http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2012.709699}


\textsuperscript{654} This statement is based on my personal recorded interviews at the premises of İHD's Diyarbakır branch, conducted on 13 December 2013 with 4 İHD activists who kindly answered all my questions. My interviewees included a branch manager, a regional representative, a member of the İHD executive committee, and the president of İHD's Diyarbakır branch.
awareness-raising and collective action in the period post-2000. Its activities in the region consist of civil disobedience, press conferences, petitions, silent sit-ins and human rights schools, among others. Drawing on my interviews with four MAZLUM-DER volunteers, including the president of the Association, what makes MAZLUM-DER consistent with the development of a social movement is that it represents neither a political party nor a state institution. It can be argued that MAZLUM-DER owes its strength in attracting larger audiences in its body to its neutral position vis à vis both the state institutions and other components of the Kurdish movement operating in the region. Based on my observations, MAZLUM-DER's campaigns successfully denounced state terror in Roboski, while showing solidarity with victims' families and relatives in question, violence on women and police use of disproportionate force on protesters during public gatherings as well as lifting the Turkish student pledge in primary schools in 2013.

Similar civil society organizations have played a key role along the MAZLUM-DER and the İHD, in the development of the Kurdish movement on social grounds with their diversified and specific action repertoire and by providing a collective, trustworthy area for ordinary people, volunteers and activists to converge. For example, the Federation of Associations in Solidarity with Prisoners' Families (TUAD-FED) is one of them and has actively participated in public demonstrations and petitions in support of the families of incarcerated people since 2003.

Altan-Olcay and Icduygu confirm my thesis as they investigate into the new types of

655 These views are based on my notes and participant observation while I visited MAZLUM-DER's Diyarbakir branch and attended one of the routine meetings of the organization there on 4 January 2014.
656 More details on specific human rights activities can be found on MAZLUM-DER's website available in Turkish at www.diyarbakir.mazlumder.org under the rubric Faaliyetlerimiz [Our work].
activism which have been able to flourish in Turkey post-2000 notwithstanding the
dependence of civil society organizations on state policies. The authors give the cases of
Kurdish and Islamist movements to back up their argument:

'Both movements have been fairly successful in the advocacy of democratisation
and human rights. The importance of the Human Rights Association (İHD), which is
mostly related with the Kurdish movement, and the Organisation of Human Rights
and Solidarity for Oppressed People (MAZLUM-DER), which collaborate their
efforts in various agendas, needs to be mentioned. The relationship of the concepts
of civil society, democracy and human rights to the Kurdish movement in Turkey is
strained by official and widespread perceptions that locate it as a violent, separatist
ethnic movement.'

In order to preserve Kurdish collective memory, culture, language and folklore, the
Mesopotamian Cultural Centre and the Kurdish Institute (both established in 1992)
standing in the heart of Istanbul have functioned as an important resource for mobilization
for migrated Kurds. In the period post-2000, Kurdish activists also benefited from other
existing means of media and written press, such as Azadiya-Welat (a Kurdish magazine
published since 1994, bilingual since 2006).

**Pro-Kurdish political parties as an important asset for resource mobilization.**

Historically, apart from a few exceptions until 1990, the Turkish electoral system was
closed to any group claiming to be overtly Kurdish or others that expressed a desire to see
the Kurdish problem resolved. During the 1991 general elections, the (pro-Kurdish)
People's Labor Party (HEP) made alliance with the Turkish social democrats of the Social
Democrat Populist Party (SHP) and secured 21 seats in the Parliament, marking the
advent of the Kurdish legal representation in Turkey. However, the most nationalist fringe
of Turkey soon resented the “danger” and the HEP was dissolved and its members were
either imprisoned or forced into exile.

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662 Altan-Olcay and Içduygu, “Mapping Civil Society in the Middle East,” 174-175.
663 For a historical overview: “Turkish Political Road Map.” *James in Turkey*, June 12, 2015. Accessed July
664 For a thorough analysis of political parties in Turkey, see: Barry, M. Rubin and Heper, Metin. *Political
665 For a thorough analysis on how challenging it was to be a political party defending Kurdish rights in
Turkey of the 1990s, see, among others: Gunes. *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey*, 159-160;
Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 85-89; Fendoglu, Hasan Tahsin. “Parti kapatma, HADEP
Ve AIHM.” [Party closure, HADEP and ECtHR] *Institute of Strategic Thinking*, January 3, 2011
In 1999, another Kurdish political party marked its footprint in Turkish electoral history. The People's Democracy Party (HADEP) managed to win forty municipalities in the April 1999 local elections. This meant that for the first time in republic's history the Kurds were administrators in their own regions with the majority of Kurdish cities henceforth governed by the elected Kurdish officials. Indeed, the origins of later debates regarding the possibility of resolving the Kurdish issue through decentralization of local governance and granting further rights to local communities can be traced back to this very electoral breakthrough in 1999. More precisely, seizing local power through municipalities was considered from the perspective of Kurdish activists as an opportunity for self-governance without pursuing an agenda for independence. Besides, in the wake of the 1999 elections, the newly elected mayors had joined in a broader community of municipalities called GAP Union of Municipalities incorporating all municipalities in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish East. This had given rise to another idea that the Kurds could take initiative on their own without necessarily waiting for the central government to act.

The Turkish electoral system, born out of the 1980 military coup, requires political parties to pass a 10 percent electoral threshold on the national level to be able to enter the Parliament. Kurdish parties have traditionally succeeded to attain over 50 percent of the vote in their regions, however never passing the mandatory electoral threshold nationally. Therefore, the seats which would have been allocated to them otherwise, are distributed among other parties making to Parliament in proportion to their overall score after each election. We can note that in the 2002 general elections the pro-Kurdish Democratic People’s Party DEHAP gained 6.2 percent of the general votes, mainly in the East and Southeast of Turkey but because of the threshold could not make its way to the Parliament.

http://www.sde.org.tr/tr/newsdetail/parti-kapatma-hadep-ve-aihm/2460; Also, for a brief overview on Kurdish party closure: “1990'dan bugüne, HEP'ten DTP'ye Kürťerin zorlu siyaset mücadelesi.” [From 1990 to today, from HEP to DTP: the Kurds' political struggle] Bia News Desk, December 12, 2009

DEHAP was the first pro-Kurdish party which was not banned by a Constitutional Court and dissolved itself in 2005 to merge with the Democratic Society Party (DTP), another pro-Kurdish party founded by prominent ex-DEP and HADEP activists.
In 2007, the legal Kurdish political movement, represented at the time by the Democratic Society Party (DTP), opted for an emergency exit: in all of the constituencies where the Kurds were a majority, the DTP presented independent candidates to participate in the elections. In this configuration, the number of parliamentary seats that can be acquired is limited but the national mandatory electoral threshold does not apply. This strategy did pay off, and in the 2007 elections the Kurdish party were able to form a parliamentary block with at least 20 deputies in the Parliament. But, most importantly, this strategy enabled the Kurds to return to the Parliament again. In 2011, the DTP left its role to the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which was able to take over the AK Party votes in the Kurdish regions in the 2011 elections, reaching a parliamentary block of 36 independent deputies.

I do not uphold that, post-2000, Kurdish political parties, civil society organizations and special-purpose associations were all given the opportunity to operate and mobilize in a fully risk-free or accommodating political environment. My point is that Kurdish activists knew how to rely on civil society organizations and political parties to pursue their strategy.

The Union of the Kurdistan Communities.
The resource mobilization in Turkey's Kurdish context gained a new dimension with the establishment of the KCK. Named by the Kurdish acronym for the Union of the Kurdistan Communities (in Kurdish, Koma Civaken Kurdistan), the KCK mobilizes grassroots and political activists for a Kurdish confederal project to be realized from bottom-up, namely through the establishment of village and neighborhood assemblies. Viewed from this perspective, the KCK is different from the mobilization of the existing resources such as political parties and other civil society organizations.

The KCK originated with the 2004 proposal of the jailed Öcalan and formalized by the PKK in their 5th Congress in May, 2007 in the Qandil mountains. KCK stated to initiate

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and develop a model for democratic confederalism drawing from Öcalan's readings of Murray Bookchin, both as an alternative configuration to the nation-state model in the Middle East and as a practical political solution to the Kurdish question in Turkey. From this perspective, Öcalan pictures the KCK as a supra-coordinating body that not only comprises the PKK, but also and ideally all other Kurdish political and social factions under its union. Öcalan, by proposing to apply Bookchin's confederalism theory in the Kurdish context criticizes real socialism and national liberation theories which had vastly impacted the Kurdish struggle in previous years. Both currents are considered to have been trapped in the idea of corrupt socialism and absolute state formation.

In the words of Jongerden, the KCK has endeavored to organize itself under the paradigm of democratic confederalism 'in opposition and as an alternative to the existing nation-state model with more of a social twist and as a bottom-up strategy.' In this sense, democratic confederalism has been perceived as something that goes beyond the nation-state as a socio-political system from within the society where activists and people do not really care about the “recognition” of their system.

Two years after its foundation, the KCK faced a rather unexpected state intervention. Thousands of KCK activists were put in jail, something which can be considered as a major threat to the social movement aspects of the Kurdish movement, most notably an obstacle for their mobilization and an attack to dry up their resources. In mainstream media, these detentions are widely known as the 'KCK operations.' From April 2009 to June 2012, nearly 2000 Kurdish activists, including democratically elected mayors, representatives and members of the pro-Kurdish BDP and the then closed Democratic Society Party (DTP),
other politicians, members of various civil society organizations and special-purpose associations, trade unionists, human rights activists, journalists and academics were detained under the charges of being KCK members, considered to have direct links with the PKK and support terrorism. The Turkish daily newspaper *Radikal* has shared with the public the distribution of detainees according to profession. The list is as follows:

- 6 deputies (elected after having been detained);
- 111 members of civil society organizations;
- 38 lawyers;
- 111 members of press or distributors of newspapers;
- 326 mayors and municipality workers;
- 17 BDP/DTP members of executive council;
- 52 BDP members of Party Assembly;
- 452 BDP representatives;
- 800 BDP members;
- 6 neighborhood/village mukhtar/headmen;
- 28 trade unionists.

The number of detainees declared by the Peace and Democracy Party is around 5000 people. To quote Jake Hess from the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP):

'since 2009, some 8,000 Kurdish rights defenders, lawyers and journalists have been arrested in operations the Turkish police say are aimed at the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), an umbrella organization that includes the PKK, and thus is also illegal. In reality, most of the detainees are connected to the legal Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which shares a political base with the PKK and voices the same demands.'

Therefore, the majority of detainees have been charged with their membership of or support to an illegal organization under Article 314 of the Turkish Penal Code. The KCK operations have been criticized and put under scrutiny by numerous international organizations such as the Human Rights Watch, who raised serious concerns about the trials and the arbitrary use of anti-terrorism laws in Turkey. Ultimately, the Human Rights Watch documented the following regarding the use of terrorism laws restricting freedom of expression and organization:

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'The prosecution of hundreds of officials, activists, and elected mayors (...) highlights the problems associated with Turkey's overboard antiterrorism laws (...). The trial raises a series of fair trial concerns common to cases involving terrorism charges, including prolonged pre-trial detention and limitations on access by defendants and their lawyers to the evidence against them (...). Judges repeatedly granted the police permission to keep hundreds of suspects under surveillance and to intercept their telephone calls and communications without properly assessing and justifying “reasonable grounds for suspicion” in individual cases.'

Besides, the KCK trials have been a major concern in the 2011 report of the European Commission, which stated that,

'frequent use of arrests instead of judicial supervision, limited access to files, failure to give detailed grounds for detention decisions and revisions of such decisions highlight the need to bring the Turkish criminal justice system into line with international standards and to amend the anti-terror legislation.'

According to Erdoğan, KCK is a political and urban branch of the PKK and aspires to lead a parallel state in Turkey, which can by no means be accepted or tolerated. According to many academics however, it is a political coup that targets the consolidation of democracy and human rights in Turkey by incarcerating human rights activists, intellectuals, politicians and journalists alike for reasons of terrorism, which is unacceptable. Also, law professor Asli Bali has thoroughly analyzed the KCK operations claiming that they are an attack to the civilian side of Kurdish politics and carried out directly by the AKP. In her view, the AKP has therefore shown that it is not pursuing a policy towards the Kurds that would be different in essence from its Kemalist predecessors.

Such a negative environment caused by the KCK operations and the drift toward

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authoritarianism did not scare the Kurdish activists away from their initial goals. The survivors, colleagues, friends and family of detainees continued to mobilize in a social movement. They began *Black Thursday* sit-in protests (in Turkish, *Kara Perşembe eylemleri*) to express their discontent in a non-violent, democratic way. These weekly protests started to take place throughout the Kurdish regions of Turkey in 2009. Although Black Thursdays have ended in some areas, they still continue to take place in others. Usually ending with a press conference with the participation of friends and family of KCK detainees as well as other political activists, it is striking to note that many of the civil society organizations such as the Chamber of Engineers have regularly participated in these gatherings which spanned over four years of collective action. They have become a way to democratically demand the release of elected political party and municipal representatives as well as other political activists, members of civil society organizations, trade unionists, journalists and human rights activists who had been arrested under the KCK operations.

Charles Tilly hypothesizes that social movements have historically been interactive political campaigns, involving specific political projects and a collective identity performance to accomplish these. Social actors express their intention to relate with a group's identity which they consider to belong to. Identity performances reach a peak during 'sustained campaigns of claim-making, an exceptional array of claim-making performances, and concerted displays of supporters' worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment [WUNC].

According to this measure, the primary goal in a collective demonstration is to convey the worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment of its participants. This holds that the

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movement in question 'designs its performances to display that it is “worthy” (good, decorous, deserving people);’ because participants carry symbols such as (flag) colors, slogans, posters; 'numerous', involving large numbers of people; and finally “committed,” mirroring the people's will to keep up their struggle against opponents. Viewed as such, Tilly's conception of WUNC displays would be the expression of collective identity-building in a social movement. On another level of analysis, it serves to call upon others (e.g., bystanders) to join in a collective movement or to support it.

Through this section a central role has been attributed to the resources Kurdish activists have disposed of both in the past and present-day. These resources include pro-Kurdish political parties, civil society organizations that promote human rights and democracy in the region, and special-purpose associations that offer specialized help and services to the people affected by poverty, unemployment, torture and state violence. These resources also provide an informal network that enable Kurdish activists post-2000 to channel their claims and demands in a more organized and effective way. Generally, a social movement's response to opportunity structures depends on the movement's organizational capacities and both available and potential resources to be mobilized. Had the Kurds not had their “own” institutions and networks by the year 2000, they could not have seized the opportunities that opened up to them as they did. These two elements – the less unfavorable political context and the existence of available resources throughout the 2000s – are intertwined. In other words, the applicability of a traditional resource mobilization approach in the Kurdish movement is tightly linked to the limping policy changes in Turkey and the shifts in the Kurds' objectives.

Nonetheless, the resource mobilization theory alone does not provide a complete account of collective action, which might as well include solidarity, sacrifice, enthusiasm, communitarian affiliations and cultural bonds in the absence of resources. In his article on the civil rights movement of the 1950s in the United States, Aldon Morris criticizes the lack

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689 Idem.

of human agency in the analysis of resource mobilization theorists. It turns out it was mainly the human agency which constituted the core of the African-American movement, emerged as it did as a long-winded struggle against the backdrop of a segregationist regime despite the lack of political and technical opportunities available.  

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Mobilization of a collective identity

In addition to the analysis of the political environment in which social movements are more (un) likely to occur and of the social, organizational, interpersonal networks they are believed to rely upon, identity appears to be one of the most important pillars of social movements in general, including the Kurdish movement. In fact, both the theories of political process and resource mobilization do not fully explain how and why individuals become activists and what specific processes they go through to turn into a collective unit. In the Kurdish context, nearly all of the scholarly-accepted social movement performances have taken place with a collective manifestation of Kurdish identity.

Identity remains an indispensable concept when observing a movement's dynamics. Snow and McAdam emphasize that one should take both personal and collective identities as tied processually in a social movement. Such a convergence between the personal and the collective takes effect through specific identity work processes that fall under the themes of identity convergence and identity construction, something which nationalism does not quite capture, for example. Identity convergence refers to a fusion between individuals and their movement, where they exchange in a supposedly trustworthy environment, and think of their movement as the best terrain to express aspects of their singular identities. One of these identities being gender, we can see it converging with the Kurdish movement, in particular through the example of woman activists. The women interviewed within this study agree that the Kurdish movement offers them an avenue to fight against the

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patriarchal norms of their society as well as domestic violence. This is substantiated in many instances: although traditionally, Kurdish women are assigned a domestic role in society, they see their engagement in politics being facilitated by both encouragement, but also most importantly a 40 percent gender quota system implemented by Kurdish political parties and the municipalities held by the latter and other multi-purpose associations, which document and fight against violence toward women in the region. Furthermore, a system of co-presidency, involving a man and a woman at the head of municipalities and political parties, is installed with the aim of empowering women. In the 2014 municipality elections, a Kurdish woman candidate ran for a metropolitan mayor's office and earned more than the half of the total votes in Diyarbakır. The mere fact that she presented herself as a candidate is considered a remarkable achievement by many, defying patriarchal hegemony both in Turkish and Kurdish politics. All these developments can be seen as an example of the concept of identity convergence arising in the Kurdish example for the purpose of destroying society’s old-established gender traditions, and to cite my interviewees, achieving a gender-equal society.

697 Personal recorded interview with the representative of East and Southeast Businesswomen Association (DOĞUNKAD) in her office on 31 December 2013; informal conversation with a veiled woman activist after her meeting in the premises of MAZLUM-DER on 2 January 2014; personal recorded interview with a nurse and poet who defines herself as a devout Kurdish patriot and activist, in her home on 11 December 2013.


699 In the words of Rusen Seydaoğlu, member of Diyarbakır bar association and a woman activist, there are more than ten women centers available to get legal, social and psychological support in Diyarbakır only. According to Seydaoğlu, women centers have only become available thanks to the works of Kurdish municipalities in Kurdish regions endeavoring to function with democratic rules as well as the works of Free Kurdish Women movement who put in their agenda the resolution of problems related to women. Seydaoğlu, Ruşen. “Yasalara rağmen... .” [Despite the state's laws...] Diyarbakır Barosu Bülten [Diyarbakır Bar Bulletin] Feb.-Mar. 2013: 14-16. Print. For more information on the activities of Diyarbakır Bar Association Women Rights Implementation Center please refer to their official website available in Turkish, Kurdish and English: www.diyarbakirbarosu.org.tr/Unit-3-Kadin-Haklari-Danisma-ve-Uygulama-Merkezi.html

By identity construction, authors draw attention to four sub-phenomena. The first concerns *identity amplification* which is 'the embellishment and strengthening of an existing identity that is congruent with a movement's collective identity but not sufficiently salient to ensure participation and activism.' Identity amplification is an interesting conceptual framework in this study to explain the role of those individuals (observed and interviewed) who identify with the purposes of collective action in their regions even when they remain politically disengaged. It provides insight into how bystanders (or previously non-active individuals) might engage in collective action on the basis of *an existing identity that is congruent with a movement's collective identity* after personal experiences of oppression, for example.

The second is *identity consolidation*, where individuals seem willing to embrace a new identity without necessarily dropping their previous identities when participating in a movement. The third is *identity extension*, a stage where personal and collective identities become so merged that even everyday encounters carry a collective significance. More precisely, identity extension implies that individuals put their collective identity in the center of their social world. The authors give the example of individuals in religious communities for whom “being a good Christian” serves not only a personal purpose but a collective goal that is reproduced through everyday encounters. For instance, it is not only about attending Sunday Mass, but also transmitting the values of Christianism throughout the community as a mission. This concept of identity extension is highly relevant within my fieldwork findings where interviewees revealed their determination to transmit a *Kurdishness* into all areas of social life. In one of the poetry events held in Diyarbakır's *Cegerxwin* Cultural Center, I came across activists who benefited from this occasion to spread political ambitions. They told me that everything they did collectively had to serve 'the Kurdish cause.' The fourth is *identity transformation*, referring to a drastic change between a person's past and present-day identities, and the way 'one now sees her- or himself as strikingly different than before.'

701 Snow and McAdam. “Identity Work Processes in the Context of Social Movements,” 49
702 Snow and McAdam. “Identity Work Processes in the Context of Social Movements,” 50
703 Snow and McAdam. “Identity Work Processes in the Context of Social Movements,” 52
**The evolution of Kurdish collective identity.**

Melucci once noted that '[t]here is no doubt that at any given moment social actors try to delimit and stabilize a definition of themselves. So do the observers.'

Provided the nationalist origins of the Kurdish movement, we can posit that a collective national Kurdish consciousness existed before and during the movement evolved into a social movement. Vladisavljević differentiates between collective identities in nationalist and social movements, for nationalist movements appear to be in a better place in terms of collective identity formation, because in the form of national or ethnic awareness, this collective identity is present prior to mobilization, which is less often the case in social movements.

A collective identity is established in connection with the past as well as in reference to the future. The link between past and future perceptions of Kurdish activists has been a salient feature of their collective identity mobilization in the present. In other words, future goals determine their present actions, while past tragedies remain both a source and motivation. For example, Kurdish activists who had been involved in different stages of the Kurdish movement or affected in one way or another by the involvement of their relatives, friends and entourage seem to stabilize their perceptions of identity based on a shared activist past. This involves, for the most part, a collective memory of grievances and human sacrifice in the face of state repression.

In order for a group's collective identity to fully mobilize, it must also be recognized by others, particularly by the group's rivals. As emphasized by Melucci, any type of recognition including denial and oppression as a form of recognition has the potential to mobilize collective identity. Denial and oppression have been repeatedly referred to by my interlocutors, a strong part of Kurdish collective identity being literally the affirmation that “the Kurds have been subject to denial and oppression in the their homeland.”

On the accounts of my interviews with scholars, journalists and authors and based on empirical evidence collected through participant observation in the premises of several

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705 Idem.
706 Idem.
Kurdish political parties, human rights and special-purpose associations as well as at the Diyarbakır town hall, a Kurdish collective identity can be characterized at first sight by two important dimensions: ethnocentrism, referring to the centrality of ethnic identity in Kurdish politics, and political maturity, allowing the Kurdish movement to maintain a certain balance between ethnicity and its political claim-making. With regard to ethnocentrism, my interviewees argue that the Kurdish movement aims to legitimize its actions through its interiority. Kurdish activists have an arsenal of self-reference and justify their political claims in the name of ethnicity. Over time, they have created a culture of resistance against what they perceive as repressive policies of the Turkish state. As a consequence, Kurdish activists cling to their identity-claims.

However, ethnocentrism has had a double connotation post-2000. It is true that claiming Kurdish rights seems to be prioritized over any other non-ethnic claim made by the Kurdish movement. However, the Kurdish movement has also become “Turkish-centric” as Kurdish activists stated to be pursuing a resolution of the conflict within the confines of the Turkish republic, while urging support from the Turkish public. In terms of reaching political maturity, it is consistent with my suggestion that the Kurdish movement is as well be Turkish-centric. It derives from the fact that the Kurds do not seem to intend to transgress the existing international borders of Turkey or threaten to do so during their political claim-making and mass demonstrations. For that, it suffices to look at what Kurdish leaders and

707 I borrow the terms, ethnocentrism and political maturity, from Jean-François Pérouse, director of the Anatolian studies (IFEA) in Istanbul. During a semi-qualitative interview, he kindly shared with me his knowledge and observations about the Kurdish movement in Turkey. The interview took place on 24 July 2013 in the premises of IFEA Istanbul and was recorded. The role of ethnicity in Kurdish politics has similarly been brought up by my other interviewees of non-Kurdish origin who believed that the Kurdish movement has a broader agenda that is not limited to ethnic claims, hence its political maturity.

708 Personal recorded interview with the director of Anatolian studies, conducted on 24 July 2013, at the IFEA, Istanbul.

709 Personal recorded interview with a Turkish journalist, conducted on 20 July 2013, in his island house in Burgazada, Istanbul.


711 This phenomenon brings to mind Joseph Nye's theory of soft power used by states and non-state actors to succeed in politics. For Nye a country's soft power includes 'its culture (when it is pleasing to others), its values (when they are attractive and consistently practiced), and its policies (when they are seen as inclusive and legitimate).’ Cf. Joseph S. Nye, Jr. “Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power.” Foreign Affairs 88.4 (2009): 160-63. Jstor. p.161. In the Kurdish example, Nye's arguments can be better understood within the lines of rather ethnic soft power, which would involve attracting Kurdish masses toward the Kurdish cause in view of inclusiveness while pressing influential regional and international
activists address in public to both their own and larger audiences.

**Participants of the Kurdish social movement.**

The contemporary Kurdish movement seems to meet Touraine's conditions of identity and opposition within its nuanced and particular context. With regard to identity, most of the people I interviewed during my fieldwork defined themselves either as actors in, participants of and/or sympathizers with the Kurdish movement in Turkey and a broader Kurdish collectivity. Whether personally active or not, most interviewees identified themselves as being committed to the radical interrogation of the Turkish state's past and present-day attitude toward the Kurdish communities living within its borders. They therefore identify themselves in opposition to the state's attitude towards them, particularly during moments of action.

As expressed by Colin Leys, 'there must be politicization of ethnicity before we can talk of the “politics of ethnicity.” Ethnicity *per se* is a cultural not a political variable.' Most of the activists in this study have defined themselves not as ethnic Kurds but as “unarguably politicized” Kurds. Those who chose to take part in collective action have participated in demonstrations, petition campaigns, rallies, sit-ins and other collective action not only in their cities of residence, but, if necessary in neighboring cities too. As Marjoka Van Doorn, Jacomijne Prins, and Saskia Welschen note, “the more a collective identity politicizes, the more willing group members will be to act collectively on behalf of their group.” Those who chose not to take part in collective action have also defined themselves as “politicized” Kurds having achieved a *Kurdishness*, in their words, a Kurdish national consciousness.

The process of politicization of a collective identity have been defined by Van Doorn, Prins, and Welschen at three different levels and *boundaries* are a key factor. Drawing largely on Taylor and Whittier, first, the differences at the social, psychological and physical levels...
between a challenger and a dominant group become salient. Internally, group members start to define themselves according to these differences vis-à-vis the dominant or other groups; externally, it is the regard of others that marks the boundaries around the group in question.

'Of key importance is the idea that boundaries are not clear-cut, stable, and objectively visible. Instead, they exist in the shared meanings attributed to group membership by group members and are by consequence dynamic.'

Second, a political consciousness guides the politicization process of a collective identity. It determines the level of group awareness, and once again, the status of the group within wider society. Third is negotiation, which ‘involves the process by which groups work to change symbolic meanings, for instance, the meaning of the group's position in society, which is commonly defined in terms of members' common interests in opposition to dominant groups.'

As Stoecker rightly argues, there can be unpredictability regarding when and how members of a community participate in collective action. There are moments when social actors identify more with the strategies of a specific action than the organizations that convey them. For instance, I have been able to observe that non-activists would decide to participate in collective action when it touched their perceived sense of national sentiments and pride, as was the case with some respondents who stated to have become politically involved not until in the aftermath of the Syrian war, which kept “our Kurdish brothers in the crossfire across the border.” The majority of my interviewees participated in public meetings, collective marches, as well as medical and financial aid campaigns, all in favor of Syrian Kurds in Northern Syria.

In the Kurdish example, it seems possible to make further distinction between the different (active and non active) components of a social movement, who can be defined as the

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715 Idem.
716 Van Doorn, Prins, and Welschen. “Protest against Whom?” 62.
717 Idem.
movement's principal components. In the literature, there is already a recognition that the root of any given social movement is not a homogenous body. What my research has similarly shown is that a component of a social movement is not politically active, does not dismiss it as an integral part of what constitutes the basis of that social movement. There is a component of the Kurdish movement, which, despite not being politically active, has impacted the Kurdish social movement by its very Kurdishness, fueling the Kurdish movement even though it does not participate politically or does so only occasionally. Thus the contemporary Kurdish movement in Turkey has comprised activists as well as non-activists. Their movement, their criticism of both the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement itself, their reasons for participation or non-participation, their fears and motivations, commitment and indifference have been significant and may confirm or dispel various hypotheses for how a Kurdish movement emerges, channels its goals, who joins in it and who supports or drops out from it.

It follows that there is no fundamental, clear-cut distinction between participants or non-participants of a movement. In the Kurdish case, it is depending on the context and the perceived gravity of the situation that people decide whether or not to embrace their organizations or social networks for a common political goal, petition or not, participate or not in collective action. The contemporary Kurdish movement is the combination of collective activities of permanent activists, temporary participants as well as non-activists who support the movement with their Kurdishness. They are animated each time with different spirits, express different goals depending on the context in which they find themselves both vis à vis the movement and the state, depending on the reaction of the state toward their sentiments, goals and levels of mobilization. In this regard, ’[o]rganizers attempt to determine the boundaries of a group, raise consciousness of alleged group members, and frame a message that appeals to those who identify with the cause.’ For example, I interviewed fierce opponents of the construction of hydroelectric dams, the so-called Hydroelectric Power Stations (HES) projects by the Turkish state in the predominantly Kurdish East and Southeast of Turkey. These interviewees define

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720 Van Doorn, Prins, and Welschen. “Protest against Whom?” 68.
themselves as Kurdish patriotic engineers who reject the state's policy regarding dam constructions, which in their view would destroy the fauna and flora of their “Kurdish homeland.” 


722 Interview with the President of Chamber of Engineers, Diyarbakır Branch, on 24 December 2013. The interview took place in the interviewee's office and was not recorded on the grounds of his wish.
CHAPTER FIVE
A Kurdish total social movement from 2013 to 2015

Introduction
Particularly from 2013 through to 2015, the decision to operate within and in opposition to the established framework of the Turkish state reached a peak point. Three major events took place during this time period to substantiate this argument. The first was the launch of the 2013 peace process between the Turkish state, the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan. The second was the context of the 2014 presidential elections, where a Kurdish activist, the president of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), was able to run for presidency. The third was the context of the June 2015 general elections, where the Kurdish candidates from the People's Democracy Party (HDP) were victorious, despite battling against the world's highest and most undemocratic electoral threshold of 10 percent. For the first time in the history of the Turkish republic, a political party with an openly Kurdish agenda entered Parliament as a Party.

The principal driving force behind these campaigns was an important project put forward by Kurdish activists, which they termed as Türkçeilesme [Turkeyfication]: an inclusive definition of national identity, which accepted being an integral part of Turkey while at the same time belonging to an ethnic group which was other than Turkish. Türkiyeilesme as a discourse and practice promoted democracy, criticized the ruling AK Party's majority in the Parliament and its drift toward authoritarianism and the increasing policies of centralization and human rights abuses deriving from intolerance of any political opposition. As a political project, it also included the aspirations of other minorities, and not just the Kurds in Turkey. Its methods included civil society activism and the mobilization of others i.e., the disadvantaged categories of the population.

723 Refer to footnote 70 for a fuller explanation of Turkeyfication.
By so doing Türkçeleşme transformed the Kurdish movement into one of social reform relevant to all aspects of Turkish society. At the same time, Türkçeleşme put to the test the commitments made by the Kurdish movement to pursue Turkey's democratization as well as the extent of interiorization of these commitments at the grassroots level. As the Kurdish party secured most of its traditional ethnic votes in the East while increasing its votes in Turkey's West for the presidential elections, and passed the electoral threshold in the general elections, the project to live on common grounds within the territorial integrity of the Turkish state with the ultimate aim of devolution of powers to regional bodies, can be said to have found deep-rooted support amongst not only the Kurdish community, but also many ethnic Turks in the other parts of the country.

These developments which did not exist before 2013 allow me to consider the dynamics of the Kurdish movement along the lines of a total social movement during this period, switching the Kurdish movement's primary focus from its traditional vocation to Türkçeleşme. According to the instigator of the total social movement theory, Touraine, a total social movement is a three-dimensional movement with social, political and national levels of action. For Touraine, it was the Polish Solidarity movement which fulfilled these criteria in 1980, as being simultaneously trade-unionist with the strikes of workers; national by its virtue of fighting the Polish Party regime under the influence of the Soviet Union; and democracy-promoting based on its relentless demands to create independent unions and achieve liberty of free association and information. Combining these three levels of action, a total social movement, for Touraine, prospectively aims to change the orientation of society and state-society relations, modify the institutional framework and obtain rights for the groups it claims to represent. It should not be monopolized by a group, organization or ideology. Yet, it should embody fierce opposition between adversaries, however not opt for violence as its main mode of protest, no matter what the challenges are.

728 Touraine, Solidarity, 40-48.
Based on this theoretical framework, I propose to call the Kurdish movement in Turkey a total social movement between 2013 through 2015, basing my argument on the Kurdish activists' capacity to combine civil society activism and the promotion of democracy with the articulations of a national identity, the nucleus of which had never disappeared. During this time frame, the Kurdish movement engages in a peace process, channels its energy into civil society activism and broader electoral campaigns, promotes the idea of a fully functioning democracy, as well as an inclusive understanding of identity for all the components of Turkish society.

On these grounds, this chapter will first expose the theory of a total social movement through the original example of the Polish Solidarity movement, upon which Touraine had initially developed his theory. Next, some of the important advancements and events of the Kurdish movement in the period between 2013 and 2015 will be described, demonstrating the civil-society activist, democracy-advocating and national aspects of the Kurdish movement, according to which we can qualify it as a total social movement in this time frame. Last but not least, the limits of the Kurdish case as a total social movement will be discussed.
The original example of the total social movement theory:

**Polish 'Solidarity' movement**

In 1980 Touraine and his colleagues carried out an in-depth research, *a sociological intervention*, on the causes and dynamics of the Solidarity movement in Poland. This method brings together social actors and provides a collective platform where they can confront each other and debate their cause, giving the sociologist an opportunity to analyze the meaning that social actors attribute to their actions from up close. The study on the Solidarity movement included direct involvement of its rank-and-file militants as well as organizers, known as the National Committee. At every level of the study, the researchers observed that Solidarity militants and leaders were committed to obtaining workers' rights, putting forward aspects of their national identity and yearning for democracy. The combination of their aspirations led Touraine and his colleagues to determine the contours of a total social movement in the Polish context of 1980.  

Solidarity came into being during the strikes of Polish workers in August 1980 but rapidly garnered national and democratic significance. This was the most crucial aspect of Solidarity: it was three-dimensional, '(…) it encompassed and incorporated national and democratic aspirations as well as those of class, and that these [are] fused and inseparable.' Touraine argued that Solidarity was clearly a trade-union activity initiated by self-confident workers who went on strike, protested low-wage, expressed solidarity with fellow workers and fought back against state repression. But it was also a national fulfilment movement. The militants of Solidarity pressed their national authority to detach itself from the influence of the Soviet union. Inspired by representative democracies elsewhere, Solidarity was also a struggle for the goal of reaching democratization in Poland. On these premises, Touraine and his colleagues' aim was 'to discover why and how these three levels of action – trade union, democratic and national – combine in Solidarity to form what may be called a total social movement aiming to change all aspects of public

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731 Martel and Stammers, “The Study of Solidarity,” 129.
life.\textsuperscript{732}

**The emergence of a total social movement.**

When analyzing Solidarity, it is important to bear in mind that it was born in a country of the Communist bloc, governed by a Party-state, or, in Touraine's formulation, a *Party-as-police*. Although Poland had become an independent state in the aftermath of the Second World War, the country remained under the shadow of the Soviet regime.\textsuperscript{733} Therefore, by the 1980s, the Polish national liberation struggle was different from more classic national liberation agendas in America and Asia. It meant to fight the status quo imposed by an outside totalitarian system.\textsuperscript{734} According to Touraine, the articulations of a Polish national identity played an important role in this fight, and subsequently in the evolution of Solidarity toward a total social movement.

Drawing on Touraine's empirical evidence, the Polish people seem to have always believed their collective existence to be found in their common language, history and Catholic faith. From this perspective, it could be argued that the Polish people have historically relied upon the objective varieties of nationalism such as language, common history, and religious affiliation to strengthen their collective national being. The repercussions of this came to surface with the work of Solidarity. In fact, against the prohibitions on the access to literary works as well as the distortions in the education sector during the communist reign, the militants of Solidarity honored and invited numerous, regime opponent, Polish writers and critics to take part in their activities. They formed work groups to revise school material and restore Polish history.

In terms of religious affiliation, the Catholic Church occupied a preponderant place in the national perception of the Polish people of themselves. For example, the majority of Solidarity workers had a history of oppression from the Prussians and Protestants against which they had coped with their Catholic faith in the past. With Solidarity, they were finally able to express their allegiance to God, and not to the Party, especially before they started

\textsuperscript{732} Touraine, *Solidarity*, 2.  
\textsuperscript{733} Touraine, *Solidarity*, 44.  
\textsuperscript{734} Touraine, *Solidarity*, 4.
work everyday. Thus, the Polish militants clung onto their national unity through the strengthening of the Polish language and the Catholic faith as a way to break their *de facto* dependency on the Soviets. However, as mentioned before, Solidarity could not be reduced to its national dimension.

Touraine and his colleagues' broad objective comprised the overall dynamics of the Solidarity movement rather than national cohesion only. Through the voices of the men and women they observed in the factories and interviewed, the authors conveyed the idea that dominant social and economic forces do not, (and as engaged post-Marxist sociologists, should not), determine the future. According to this measure, social actors, however subordinate they may appear, possess the capacity to produce a history of their own through various forms of struggle. They have the will to bring about change and create momentum.

Perhaps the following quote best explains how the militants of Solidarity, whose numbers had reached as many as ten million at the beginning of 1980, were driven by the desire to change the general orientation of their society through the denouncement of workplace injustices and at the time, communist bureaucracy:

'The members of Solidarity are not only conscious of being downtrodden; they have a positive awareness of themselves and of their rights. As producers, they oppose the incompetence and corruption of the managers of industry (...) [t]heir movement is not a mechanical reaction to oppression which has become unbearable: it manifests ideas, choices, a collective will.'

Therefore, although Solidarity emerged and consolidated itself in the factories, it surpassed the activation of working-class consciousness among workers. The issues at stake between the participants of Solidarity and the party regime went beyond the regulation of wages and conditions of employment. The workers wanted to cast aside Party rule and establish an independent trade-union which could operate freely and defend not only workers' but everybody else's rights in the country, which can be seen as one of the highest criteria of democracy. Therefore, another non-negligible aspect of Solidarity was that it 'appeal[ed] openly to the values of Western democracy, human rights and political pluralism.'

736 Touraine, *Solidarity*, 97.
737 Touraine, *Solidarity*, Introduction (p.2).
members of Solidarity did not compromise in pursuing social justice, freedom of expression, organization and information, which were the primary objectives of their movement since its very inception.\textsuperscript{738}

In Touraine's thinking, a total social movement does not resort to violence. Neither should it engage in a purely nationalist, socialist, revolutionary or any ideological rhetoric to survive. Ideologies care less about social justice and democracy and lead actors be stuck with the achievement of some sort of historic destiny.\textsuperscript{739} A total social movement remains an organized, preferably non-violent, campaign and relies on its own original dynamics no matter what the circumstances are\textsuperscript{740} or have become. Between 1980 and 1981, the Solidarity movement achieved the following outcome: workers were able to obtain a free trade-union and were now discussing how to keep up their struggle as well as implement their cherished democratic ideals in the face of new hardships and challenges.

In December 1981, in a primary attempt to destroy the union, the government in Poland declared martial law. Interpretations vary, but this did manage to prevent the Soviets from further interfering in the internal affairs of Poland. Then, as an economic downfall was declared to be under way, the government reinforced the imposition of martial law. In response, Solidarity did not compromise on its non-violent, national and democracy-advocating nature. The militants of Solidarity reached a common ground, in a relative way, between trade-union activity and political action; this time, by prioritizing self-management as a non-ideological but practical solution.\textsuperscript{741} Based on direct information from the ground and the findings from group meetings in which militants spoke and researchers interpreted (cf. the sociological intervention method), self-management meant freeing

\textit{'the management of industry from the hold of the Party and the nomenklatura. That being the common base, opinions then diverge, some imagining something akin to workers' control, others thinking more of the recognition of economic rationality on a less formalised and more pragmatic basis.'}\textsuperscript{742}

It can be argued that every movement contains plural dynamics like Solidarity, without

\textsuperscript{738} Touraine, \textit{Solidarity}, Introduction (p.4).
\textsuperscript{740} Touraine, \textit{Solidarity}, 5.
\textsuperscript{741} Touraine, \textit{Solidarity}, 95.
\textsuperscript{742} Touraine, \textit{Solidarity}, 94.
necessarily qualifying as a total social movement. Though, not every movement resists temptation. In other words, in the face of challenges and hardships such as martial law, state violence, the prevailing of an ideology, or the presence of armed activities, not every social movement remains attached the way it had started. For example, Solidarity drew most of its strength from self-confident, self-emancipated workers. It could have become a proletarian movement, confining its demands to the workplace. Moreover, the militants of Solidarity were not short of national attachments. Like other nations, they took pride in their common history and language to reject foreign domination. Therefore, it could also have rapidly mutate into a strictly nationalistic struggle against the Soviet Union, inciting people to violence in the name of a Polish nation, for example. In such a scenario, Solidarity could have easily mobilized the Catholic church’s support in order to address large segments of religiously-devoted population in this hypothetic fight. Last but not least, as the type of democracy that was promoted had not been implemented and its ramifications yet unknown, Solidarity could have diverged its orientation from democracy to some other ideal. In this light, what secured Solidarity its legitimacy as a total social movement was the way in which its militants managed to remain committed not to allow a specific group or ideology monopolize or modify their initial objective which was to change the orientation of society in which they lived, through social, peaceful, and democracy-rewarding activities.
Applying Touraine's total social movement theory to the Kurdish case

Despite challenges and limitations, I aim to bring Touraine's total social movement theory into discussion with the Kurdish movement, testing it as an example placed outside of the Western context in which the theory had initially been incubated. As discussed throughout this thesis, the Kurdish movement in Turkey having traditionally been a movement for the liberation of the Kurds, it attained neither independence nor autonomy, as opposed to other similar movements in modern history. The closest it has come in this regard is the Turkish state's recognition of a Kurdish reality from the early 2000 onward. Since the claims for a Kurdish identity are no longer articulated in the context of a bid for the establishment of a separate state, they suggest a willingness to work within the existing political system in Turkey, albeit calling for significant change to the system, including the reevaluation and redrafting of the Turkish constitution established with the military coup of 1980 and the decentralization of power across Turkey.

Especially from 2013 through 2015 the Kurdish movement has become simultaneously democracy-advocating, civil-society activist and national. During this timescale, there were three major turning points. First, a long-winded Kurdish struggle was awarded by peace talks between the Turkish government, the PKK and Öcalan, with direct and positive impacts on Kurdish grassroots and activists in Turkey. In their perspective, the peace process was “formalized” when Öcalan's letter was read out to the crowds gathered for Diyarbakır's historic Newroz celebrations.

The peace process, to a large extent, meant leaving behind violence. However, by no means did it mean that opposition between the Kurds and the Turkish state ended. It, in fact, gradually took on a different form: from the Kurdish activist front, the period involved mistrust toward government initiatives, and a desire to change the orientation of society as conceived by the AK Party. From the government front, it meant mistrust of the Kurds, and a drift toward authoritarianism in general.

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The second development in this timescale was Turkey's presidential elections. For the first time in the history of the republic, a Kurdish candidate presented himself for the president's office on behalf of a political party with a bold history of oppression, closure, and opposition because of its explicit Kurdish agenda.

The third development was the environment in which the general elections took place in June 2015, where the Kurdish movement appeared to have reached the peak of a total social movement. For the first time in decades, the Kurdish party presented itself as a political party rather than as independent candidates despite the 10 percent threshold which still is in vigor.

But what made the Kurdish movement total in Touraine's sense was its project of Türkiyelileşme, which enjoyed the confidence of large segments of the population, including Turks and Kurds as well as other minorities. It moved out from the demands of a unique ethnic group. Although identity claims occupied an important place still, it can be argued that Türkiyelileşme brought an inclusive aspect to the national identity of the Kurdish movement. Furthermore, its democracy-advocating performances broadened to the inclusion of women, minorities and other disadvantaged categories in political representation while new horizons were touched and concerns widened to all aspects of public life such as economy, infrastructure, and environment. In the presence of all the aforementioned, the Kurdish movement united social, political and national claims and the necessity to release a social space for themselves, in which they could fight for their rights through legal means which were traditionally undermined by the drawbacks of a homogenous, unitarian and oppressive political system.

This environment sufficed to largely modify Kurdish activists' modes of action in their regions and across the country. Their performances were as robust as during war times (particularly the 1990s) but essentially less violent, and were positively influenced by the

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745 I borrow the term social space from Alain Touraine.
PKK's compromise on its initial goal to achieve statehood and promise to end the armed campaign. I observed that not a single day went by without a specific campaign: a street protest denouncing the incarceration of political activists and the rolling down of shutters by shopkeepers; a collective gathering against the construction of new military headquarters in the region; a press conference held by representatives of human rights associations; a collective prayer session in Kurdish to contribute to the public use of their mother tongue; or a silent sit-in in memory of those disappeared at the hands of previous governments. Other participant observations of my research included the mobilization of many activists who first gathered in BDP premises in Diyarbakır and then head to demonstrations that periodically take place in frontier villages and/or cities with Syria's mainly Kurdish populated regions. They expressed their support for the Kurds of Syria while empathizing immensely with their plight. These gatherings were campaigned by the umbrella organization, Coordination for Syrian Kurdistan, which was established in Diyarbakır in the immediate aftermath of the escalation of the Syrian conflict. A woman activist and member of this Coordination informed this study that their goal is 'to overcome the discrepancies that might occur among different Kurdish political actors in Turkey and Syria.' This furthermore exemplified the mobilization of existing solidarity mechanisms to facilitate cross-border aid and communication between the Kurds on either side of the frontier.

In the total social movement theory, violence is the enemy of the social. Historically drawing on Latin American guerrilla movements, Touraine explored the way the logic of violence disconnected these movements from principal civil society organizations, such as


747 A Turkey analyst for the Eurasia blog, Schleifer wrote: 'One of the darkest legacies of the Turkish state's fight against the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the 1990's is the large number of enforced disappearances that took place in the predominantly-Kurdish southeast region. Human rights workers in the region believe some 1,000 people to have disappeared by suspected state actors during that time.' Source: Schleifer, Yigal. "Turkey: Making the case for the Kurdish disappeared." Eurasia Net | The Turko File, September 3, 2012. http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65855

748 Personal recorded interview with a woman activist on 7 December 2013 in the BDP premises of Kayapanar district, Diyarbakır. Member of the Coordination for Syrian Kurdistan since 2012, my interviewee is a mother of three and has been a voluntary activist within the Kurdish movement for over 18 years at the time of interview.
trade unions and the communist party in Bolivia for example, ultimately destroying the social aspect of their politics. In fact, for Touraine, the way to combat a corrupt or a repressive state should be through the union of different groups within a society that carry out an organized campaign, persevering without armed activities. Considering the matter in the nuanced context of Turkey's Kurds, the total social movement, the case of which is made here, was damaged in the aftermath of the snap elections of November 2015, when the Turkish state and the PKK resorted to violence as their main mode of dealing with the Kurdish question. This proved extremely hostile for both ordinary Kurds and activists living and operating in the region. As the political context became severe, the Kurdish legal party also sharpened its language while Kurdish guerrillas brought war into cities. The total social movement mostly vanished when the armed activities of the Kurdish groups received passive assent from grassroots and legal activists; put it differently, when the latter had to suspend most of their civil campaigns because of violence.

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749 Touraine, *Critique de la modernité*, 104.
The peace process that was:  
The civil society activism element

In 2013, the Turkish state's treatment of the Kurdish agenda was brought into sharp focus by the peace negotiations between PKK's jailed leader Öcalan, Turkish government officials and the PKK. The trajectory of Turkey's Kurdish movement took on the normalization of relations, however precariously, with the Turkish state.750 The prospects of hope and peace had never looked so real.751 In the words of my interviewees, the peace process provided a possibility to 'address the Kurdish issue through non-violence as a matter of human rights and a critique of state oppression, with the hope that the Turkish public understands us rightly.'752 The withdrawal of the majority of Kurdish armed groups from Turkey further produced a tangible effect on the trajectory of the Kurdish movement that was now coming to the fore with its non-violent and peace-rewarding activities. The assassinated chairman of Diyarbakır Bar, Tahir Elçi, wrote:

'...the peace process reached a historic momentum when Abdullah Öcalan's message was read out loud during the Newroz celebrations in Diyarbakır. This meant that politics and democracy would further be strengthened as a way to end the armed conflict that costed forty thousand lives to our peoples.'753

Before I arrived in the field, a record number of 778 civil society organizations from across the region had issued a common declaration in support of the peace process.754 The president of the Human Rights Association's Diyarbakır branch, Raci Bilici, had shared with public the following:

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752 This expression has come up time and time again throughout the entire fieldwork.


'The peace process, which started on the basis of talks between the Turkish state and the PKK, has now led to a conducive environment for peace and the resolution of the problems we are facing in the region but also in all of Turkey. Öcalan's call to withdraw PKK military forces outside of Turkey is the most important step in this regard. We, as regional civil society organizations, wholeheartedly support this process and believe that a new constitution that can correspond to the demands of the Kurdish people shall now be unavoidable.'

Almost everybody I have encountered, both in Istanbul and Diyarbakır, asserted to have faith in the peace process and saw this as a breakthrough. The belief was that their claim-making, or in their words, their struggle, had paid off, and that they would ultimately succeed in obtaining constitutional rights as a people. In this sense, having faith in the peace process meant more than the peace itself and reflected faith in the legacy and continuity of what they called as Kurdish resistance.

Non-violent, civil society activism became vigorous in this time period. Most aspects of the peace process were also exposed to the public. A delegation of wise people was initiated on 4 April 2013 by Turkey's governing AK Party. The main opposition to this came from

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755 “778 STK’dan çözüm sürecine destek deklarasyonu.” [778 civil society organizations declare support for the peace process] Diyarbakır Bülteni no:10 [Diyarbakır Bulletin no:10] Aug.-Nov. 2013: p.50. Print. (My translation from Turkish.) For the information of the reader, Mr. Raci Bilici shared the same views with me when I interviewed him in the premises of IHD during fieldwork.


the ultra-nationalist action party (MHP), and to some degree, the secular nationalist party (CHP), who opposed the peace process with the PKK on the grounds that it aimed to divide unitarian Turkey, the heritage of Ataturk. Nonetheless, the wise people delegation was able to pursue and visit citizens in their homes and workplaces, even in the most forgotten corners of the country, organizing formal as well as informal seminars and talks with them. The delegates included people from all walks of life, such as political actors, artists, singers, writers, intellectuals, and unionists; in short, those respected by the Turkish and Kurdish public for what they have achieved professionally. A particular focus of this work was the inclusion of bottom-up demands, addressed to the members of delegations, who did not represent a political party or a specific ideology. The delegates had a unique goal in mind: to discuss with the public the 2013 peace initiative and the concrete steps taken by both parties as to whether or not these were sufficient. They also emphasized that the Kurdish-Turkish conflict had created heavy socio-economic problems and that it was time to bring stability and peace to the country. This way, the public was targeted to become fully involved in the process of democratization and political change in Turkey.

*Neighborhood councils.*

This atmosphere also led to the strengthening of civil society organizations in the Kurdish regions. During my interviews at the BDP premises, I was told that both ordinary Kurds and activists operated mainly within the neighborhood, provincial and regional councils and assemblies, where they would periodically draw up their voluntary action plans. I met a dozen individuals from these assemblies, who were not only Kurdish nationalists but religious and feminist activists, human rights defenders and rebellious youth. Drawing on this example, Akkaya and Jongerden went as far as to make a case for a Kurdish version of democratic confederalism, which ‘refers to a societal organisation that can be characterized as a bottom-up system for self-administration, organised in Turkey at the levels of village

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(köy), urban neighbourhood (mahalle), district (ilçe), city (kent), and region (bölge) (...). In this regard, I propose to look at the content of the interview made available by Turkish journalist Pınar Öğünç, which provides insight into how a direct democracy might work in the Kurdish context. The interview was made with the co-chairs of one of these councils, the Şehitlik council, a sociologist member of that council as well as a delegate of the Democratic People's Congress (DTK).

The Şehitlik council is formerly entitled, Free and Equal Citizen Association (in Turkish Eşit Özgür Yurttash Derneği). Based on Öğünç's findings, the neighborhood councils are conceived as the smallest unit of the “democratic autonomy” model. They are run by co-chairs, a male and a woman, elected by neighborhood residents. People come here when they need advice. It is also a place where they socialize and engage in political conversation. There are also regular meetings in which residents are directly involved in the process of decision-making on issues ranging from routine problems to reconciling family disputes to where new garbage containers are to be placed. Unsolved problems are transferred from neighborhood councils to the city council. The neighborhood council is required to communicate its income-expense budget to residents every six months. The co-chairs are present daily in the Council. There are no paid employees. Participants operate on a voluntary basis.

In Diyarbakır's Yenişehir neighborhood alone, there are nine councils. The same is the case for other towns and districts in surrounding provinces. The councils are initiated by the pro-Kurdish political party and do not consist of their voters only, but also of residents with other political affiliations. According to the accounts collected by Öğünç:

'O our aim is to inform people that their mayor is not the sole authority. They should be able to decide for what needs to be done. They have the right to hold their representatives accountable for what they do for the neighborhood and how. People

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762 Idem.
763 Idem.
make their demands, but it is important for this process to be guided and controlled by a political party.\textsuperscript{764}

Akkaya and Jongerden believe that the establishment of neighborhood, provincial and regional councils and assemblies gives them the possibility to apply the theory of 'radical democracy' in the Kurdish context. They most notably draw their conclusions from their analysis of the discourses of PKK elites, who at least in rhetoric prioritized a such approach following Öcalan's calls: 'It is known that the most urgent duty of our Party is to accomplish a democratic confederal system as a social organization. However, we have not achieved that collective spirit of a democratic communal system yet. We still have setbacks.'\textsuperscript{765} At its most basic form, radical democracy advocates the inclusion and acceptance of differences that lack in a universalist system at the detriment of particularities; in socialism at the detriment of political freedoms; in capitalism with its strict applications creating inequalities; and in liberalism with its inability to correct the aforementioned. A Kurdish version of radical democracy is tied with the principle of 'democratic confederalism,' Akkaya and Jongerden posit, and 'refers to self-governance of communities, where the aim is not to create a state, but to build a democratic society.'\textsuperscript{766}

Kurdish activists believe that democratic confederalism provides autonomy for local communities and endows them with resources and the ability to challenge the political, cultural and economic institutions in place.

During fieldwork I also took note of BDP activists' determination in campaigning for local elections and in increasing the number of local committees and neighborhood, provincial and regional councils and assemblies to expand their grassroots base and capacity, in general.\textsuperscript{767} As opposed to previous elections and on the basis of my conversations with Kurdish activists, the number of candidates who wished to be elected from the BDP's list

\textsuperscript{764} Öğünç, “Kürtler demokratik özerklikle ne istiyor,” 2014.
\textsuperscript{766} Jongerden, “Radicalising Democracy,” 2015.
increased considerably within the last few years.\textsuperscript{768} This can be explained by two factors. The first is related to Charles Tilly's flexible political process approach, which creates favorable conditions for further mobilization. Kurdish activists perceived the favorable environment resulting from the peace process as a way to engage more actively in Kurdish politics, run more ambitiously for elections, and expand their grassroots base and capacity. The second is a more interesting phenomenon, which can be explained through the rational choice theory. A rational choice, posits Douglas Heckathorn, 'is not wedded to a grim view of actors as ruthless opportunists.'\textsuperscript{769} As mentioned earlier, given the more conducive environment for activism in Turkey, one can argue that the motivations of activists have also been partially transformed into something quite fitting within the rational choice explanations. As the Kurds gained more local and municipal powers, especially in the Kurdish populated areas, and gained more seats in the Turkish Assembly, this simultaneously meant that one's activism with an openly Kurdish agenda does not, unlike in the past, always end in prison or meets brute state force. Indeed, many activists saw themselves awarded by important positions, elected as they were as mayors, councilors, local assembly or political party representatives, or deputies. Olson explains this as part of the rewarding of social incentives which can motivate people to win prestige and respect: '[t]he possibility that, in a case where there was no economic incentive for an individual to contribute to the achievement of a group interest, there might nonetheless be a social incentive for him to make such a contribution, must therefore be considered.'\textsuperscript{770}

\textit{Religion and politics: a balancing act?}

Delanty and O'Mahony state:

'[Nationalism] is based, first on the fact of its largely secular nature. Even though nationalism has often made alliances with religion, it is an irreversibly secular force, and may be called a kind of civil religion. Although nationalist ideas are often dogmatic and strive to be hegemonic, they are nevertheless discursively articulated and seek to convince. In general, then, secularization has been one of the strongest

\textsuperscript{768} There is not any polling data available for this. The statement is based on the information given to me by the BDP activists in Diyarbakir.


\textsuperscript{770} The existence of these social incentives (…) strengthens [group-oriented action], \textit{for social status and social acceptance are individual, noncollective goods}. Social sanctions and social rewards are “selective incentives”; that is they are among the kinds of incentives that may be used to mobilize a latent group.' Source: Olson, \textit{The Logic of Collective Action}, 60-61.
impetuses to the intellectualization of nationalism.\textsuperscript{771}

Particularly from 2011 onward, the Kurdish political representatives as well as grassroots activist groups had already started to show up in large-scale, religious demonstrations,\textsuperscript{772} such as the holy birth week.\textsuperscript{773} They attended the holy birth week in the first ranks and carried posters of Kurdish religious figures and rebels in history. As explained by Burhan Ekinci, the motive for this was an awakening for Kurdish activists in that, 'religion should not be neglected if they were to address all Kurds, and the option is to change the movement's discourse with regard to religion.'\textsuperscript{774} Indeed, this was also a time when the Kurdish movement enhanced its political claim-making through what many analysts have termed as 'the religious opening of the Kurdish movement.'\textsuperscript{775}

To many, the proponents of Kurdish nationalism, or the Kurdish movement in Turkey, had long disregarded the importance of religion within Kurdish society. To the extent that Kurdish activists had adopted an “anti-religious discourse” for many years, explains Metin Bozan, Professor at Dicle University of Diyarbakır.\textsuperscript{776} Upon recognizing that the majority of Kurds remained attached to their religious beliefs and practices all this time, Kurdish political activists thought the movement could be better off altering its strategy vis à vis religion and in relation to the faith-based organizations in the region by creating intermovement networks. I have collected similar evidence during my two visits to the Association of Religious Scholars and Solidarity, DİAY-DER, a faith-based organization whose members define themselves as “patriotic imams.” I have conducted two recorded interviews and one focus group there, and one of the main points raised was that they favored a political system like the European Union, applied to Turkey. More specifically, they asserted that they favor a national identity, which belongs to Turkey, Türkiyeli, and the obtention of “some sort of” self-governance. In this regard, these imams approved of

\textsuperscript{771} Delanty, and O'Mahony. \textit{Nationalism and Social Theory,}” 17.
\textsuperscript{773} The holy birth week is the birth week of the Prophet Muhammed, celebrated between April 14-20.
Öcalan's proposals, they supported his peace plan. In solidarity with the campaigns of civil disobedience in the region, DİAY-DER spearheaded Civil Fridays, a series of powerful public collective prayers performed in Kurdish, rather than in Turkish or Arabic as is the custom. The prayers took place throughout the entire region every Friday and at a public square chosen by religious activists. Civil Fridays brought together the faithful and activists, religious and political Kurdish leaders. Remarkably, at the end of every public session, demands for democracy and constitutional recognition would gain ground over religiously-oriented demands. The fact that Civil Fridays lasted more than thirty months, marking an important change in the Kurdish movement's political agenda post-2011, is a perfect example of civil society activism in the Kurdish movement.

On another level of analysis, the Kurdish movement's take on religion can also be understood within the framework of its desire to challenge Turkish state authorities on every level, and mostly with the goal of keeping the AK Party from appealing to the Kurds. It is not a mystery that the AK Party with its promotion of Islam was able to address Kurdish audiences and earn their trust and collaboration in many of the major cities in the Kurdish East and Southeast. It has come out the second party, if not the first, during all three of the past general and legislative elections. Kurdish opponents see such outcomes as “dangerous” for their own strategies and the “new” system they wish to put in place. Let us not forget that both forces address the same electorate.

Since religion has always been one of the most delicate issues particularly in Kurdish society, it seemed that Kurdish activists believed it would be difficult and politically

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778 Kumru, “[Civil Friday in Diyarbakır]” 2011.

779 This information is based on the information provided in a focus group, conducted by myself with a dozen of religious activists in the premises of DİAY-DER, Diyarbakır on 5 December 2013.


“irrational” for them to challenge people's beliefs or worldviews in that respect. Therefore, they adopted a mixed approach by combining their political agenda with that of the faith-based organizations. This required that they gradually abandon a purely secularist discourse within a conservative community of “faithful Kurds” while defending the political concept of fraternity from a religious viewpoint.

A total social movement can be qualified as unfolding issues other than ethnic identity. According to Touraine, social movements are total when social actors give a complete definition of their collective identity and of their opponent as well as ultimately, of the stakes over which they enter into conflict against their opponents. In that sense, a total social movement theory fills a philosophical gap in the literature of social movements not only because does it focus on what social movements do and how they come about, but offers a prospective science too. Touraine considers a total social movement as 'the effort of a collective actor to seize on the values [of] society by opposing to the actions of an adversary with whom they maintain power relations.'

Within the same context, the Kurds tried to develop a broader perspective to integrate the rights of many other disadvantaged categories of Turkey's population into a constitutional or legal framework from a more functional and participatory democracy prospect. This is the reason why women were provided with more opportunities to present themselves as candidates in the elections on equal terms with their male counterparts. The active presence of women in politics, in what is believed to be a patriarchal society, aims to transform not only the traditional aspects of society in which they live, but also to challenge the prevailing political system in Turkey, where women as in many other parts of the world

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782 Focus group data, collected in the premises of DİAY-DER, Diyarbakır, on 5 and 6 December 2013.
784 Touraine, Production de la société, 360-363, 365.
786 Touraine, Critique de la modernité, 277. (My translation from French).
787 For example, the Women Unit of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality was established on 8 March 2012 and declares its objective to fight patriarchal mentality at the institutional level. Source: Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality. Kadın Birimi Bülteni. [Women Unit Bulletin] Year 1. No 1. Istanbul: Gün,

are still subject to diverse forms of discrimination.\textsuperscript{788} This logic can also be applied to the case of LGBT activists, Turks and Kurds alike, and other equity-seeking groups in Turkey that were given a voice within the Kurdish movement.\textsuperscript{789} In this regard, several Kurdish activists and representatives brought up the issue of LGBT community rights during both street demonstrations and parliamentary sessions.

It is important to draw attention to the “double marginalization” that has been brought up by many Kurdish LGBT activists.\textsuperscript{790} On one hand, they do not want to migrate to Western Turkey on the fair grounds that they do not want to leave their home. On the other hand, a conservative Kurdish society makes their life extremely difficult there: 'once, I was bullied and had to say I was from another town. [My aggressors] said if I were a native of Diyarbakır, they would have beaten me up.'\textsuperscript{791} Overall, Kurdish LGBT activists feel that they are a discriminated minority within a minority: 'when you live in Diyarbakır, the main problem is the “Kurdish problem.” (...) As homosexuals, we are further marginalized. We can't open up to our families. Those who did had to leave. We want a free country, we want a free Diyarbakır.'\textsuperscript{792}

LGBT activists of Kurdish origin were able to participate in the Newroz celebrations in


\textsuperscript{789} İzci, İpek. “It is difficult to say I am Kurdish and gay!” \textit{Radikal}, October 22, 2013; Lowen, Mark. “Turkey election: Kurds, women, gays put faith in upstart party.” \textit{BBC Europe}, June 1, 2015 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-32950750; Robins-Early, Nick. “Meet the HDP, the pro-gay, pro-women Kurdish party shaking up Turkey's politics.” \textit{The Huffington Post}, August 6, 2015 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/08/turkey-hdp-party_n_7537648.html

\textsuperscript{790} Also for more information on the activities of LGBT activists in the Kurdish regions and consult their brochures which are available online, see: http://www.hebunlgbt.org/?cat=1


Diyarbakır for the first time in 2011. Although LGBT activists express hardships as being both Kurdish and homosexual within their own Kurdish community where they are discriminated against, the chance to demonstrate with their LGBT identity and flags in an extremely political and cultural event such as Newroz demonstrates that the Kurdish movement has tried to integrate the disadvantaged. One of the Kurdish LGBT activists interviewed shared their wish and commitment to see an LGBT activist becoming a deputy elected from the pro-Kurdish party in the near future.

The same logic can furthermore be applied to members of other minorities such as the Assyrians, Chaldeans, Armenians, Yezidis and Alevis who were given a voice within the legal Kurdish party to present themselves as candidates in Turkey's national elections. This demonstrated the Kurdish movement's effort to appeal to a wider audience but, more importantly, to provide opportunities to those minorities whose identities were not represented politically or institutionally. If identity can refer to either ethnicity or citizenship, in the Turkish constitution they are one. The Kurdish movement, by integrating other minorities in its body, proposes that this concept of identity can be modified and a new concept encompassing Turkey's communities can be achieved.

The democracy-advocating aspects

Following the aftermath of the Arab spring and the Syrian war, the changing geopolitics of the Middle East had a considerable impact on the Kurds, inspiring and then reinserting them as an important actor in the region. With the stagnation of the Syrian conflict that hit hard the Kurds of Syria – we all have in mind the example of the Kurdish city of Kobane besieged for more than 6 months by the Islamic State – the regional popular support for the Kurds and their organizations including the PKK and the PYD increased. In the Middle East, “the PKK is the sole organization that can protect the Kurds” was the most repeated phrase uttered by Kurdish activists during my interviews. The impacts of external phenomena on Turkey's Kurds are clearly apparent, despite the fact that such externalities have been generally dismissed in Touraine's theory.

As a result of this climate, a somewhat paradoxical situation occurred. On one hand, an extremely strong Kurdish movement posed itself as the main actor for a democratic transition of Turkey, while on the other, the Kurds did not seem ready to renounce armed struggle in definitive terms, which would otherwise correspond to Touraine's idea of total domination of social. By total domination of social, Touraine means permanent social movement activity based on historicity and non-violence.

With the commencement of the 2013 peace process the Kurds moved away from their previous militant tactics and instead used mainly democratic channels to robustly campaign for political recognition. Kurdish activists were now more focused on their demands for constitutional rights in Turkey. The regional upheavals indicated that they would be better off by actively participating in the process of democratization in their country, which was seen as a lower risk strategy than that of secession. My numerous interviews with Kurdish activists in their regions have confirmed that the Kurdish movement in Turkey saw itself as a movement spurring Turkish democratization.

The international media has immensely covered the Kurds' battle in Kobane against the Islamic State. The following two articles provide further insight into the fight inside Kobane and its regional impact. See: Dray, Julien. “Un petit Stalingrad.” Le Huffington Post, October 16, 2014; Fisk, Robert. “War with Isis: the forgotten, plucky Kurds under siege in their enclave on Syria’s border with Turkey.” The Independent, November 13, 2014; Gürsel, Kadri. “PKK bir Ortadoğu güçü olarak yükseliyor.” [The PKK is a rising power in the Middle East] Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse, August 27, 2014.
The challenge however was that for Kurds and Turks to enjoy parity within a single legal system, there had to be a major political transformation of the Turkish state. This would mean transitioning from a highly centralized, (semi-) authoritarian and unitarian regime toward a more democratic and multicultural system. In the literature, multiculturalism is usually associated with the demands of 'subaltern' groups for recognition in contemporary politics. Kymlicka notes that multiculturalism is sometimes seen as conflicting with liberal conceptions of democracy (unequivocally flawed in Turkey) because of its focus on communitarian or group rights placed against individual rights. However, as he then rightly argues, granting group rights to 'national minorities' would be extremely beneficial, preventing any real or potential injustices encountered by them. Kymlicka's original contribution further attests that multiculturalism as a national policy does not necessarily 'involve renunciation of liberal principles of individual freedom and social equality, but rather the application of these principles to new conditions of ethnocultural diversity.'

From Kymlicka's perspective, securing group rights within a national setting would be an advancement if applied in Turkey's context and seems to go perfectly hand in hand with the demands of the Kurds to be granted group rights within the borders of their domicile state. The most basic conception of self-determination dictates that populations with a distinct culture and language have a natural right to decide their future independently. Alternatively, self-determination is the granting of a set of rights that allows a distinct group to be 'themselves.' For example, the Basques, Scottish or Corsicans are in a position of what one might refer to as internal self-determination, yet they do not constitute independent

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797 I borrow this term from Charles Taylor.
800 Idem.
801 Here I think of Herder's conceptualization (by Charles Taylor) of the idea that as human beings we have an authentic way of being ourselves, which is the basis of the new morality in modern human consciousness. In the case of an individual, being true to one's self means being loyal to one's inner voice that tells him or her what is wrong and what not. In the case of a group, it means being true to one's own culture. The condition is that groups should not imitate other groups and remain loyal to their authentic culture. For Taylor, this idea underpins the origin of modern nationalisms. For a more detailed analysis: Taylor, Charles. “The Politics of Recognition.” In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by Amy Gutmann: 25-73. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
802 By this I mean non-territorial arrangements for a distinct ethnic group in a single state.
states. I argue that between 2013 and 2015 the Kurdish movement moved away from the first conception of self-determination, wanting to be qualified rather in the second category. The slogan entrenched in the Kurdish grassroots, “democracy in Turkey equals the solution to the Kurdish problem” confirms this.

The Kurds' objective has been an ambitious political project with broader societal implications and change, overlapping with the core thesis of Touraine that a social movement is the expression of political transformation, thereby of reproduction of society by social actors. The Kurdish movement aimed at renewing Turkey and making it a country in which the Kurds could live as equals with their fellow Turkish citizens. A such agenda is more radical than disintegration. In the former, there is a need to address larger nationalist Turkish audiences and convince nationalist Kurds, who for example might rather favor the idea of territorial independence. In the case of territorial separation, transforming the opponent is not what is intended. Usually armed campaigns take over politics until perhaps a mutual agreement is reached between antagonists. The representatives of the Kurdish movement, diverse as they are, both in parliamentary politics or otherwise – including Kurdish mayors, political party representatives, members of Parliament, leaders of civil society organizations, guerrilla commanders, “patriotic” religious leaders – all engaged in a democratic discourse, aimed at a full democratization of the Turkish state. They wanted rights as a distinct people granted on a constitutional basis, and that issues related to human rights, economic and regional development, local administration and minorities be resolved within that constitutional framework.

Kurdish representatives whom I have had the chance to interview or exchange informal conversations with, including the mayor of Diyarbakır, deputies, presidents of diverse chambers of commerce and human rights associations as well as religious opinion leaders, they have, in one way or another, brought up the Basque and Scottish models as a

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potentiality with regard to the resolution of the Kurdish problem. Great Britain and Spain are therefore among the first to be cited as a role model for Turkey to follow. Unfortunately, however, these examples might not be realistic in the short term at least. Great Britain and Spain do not consider themselves as monoethnic entities and their level of democratic achievement appears higher than Turkey's. This is perhaps the reason why local or minority populations in these two settings seem to be more keen to accept non-territorial arrangements in substitution for self-determination. The recent example of Scotland is indicative here as the Scottish referendum on independence was rejected by the majority of Scottish nationals.

In order to offer a more realistic vision of how much furthest the Turkish state might go to meet the expectations and demands of the Kurdish grassroots, one needs to examine the nature of this state more closely. The Turkish constitution is based on the existence of a unique entity: the Turks. Following this conception, other people do not legally “exist.” Thus, asking Turkey to choose from the methods adopted by Britain or Spain would mean dismantling the current state structure of Turkey. This, of course, can be a legitimate demand but no one seems to want it. My fieldwork has indicated that Kurdish activists and non activists alike prefer to remain part of actual Turkey with further rights and freedoms devolved to them. To the extent that the Kurdish struggle in Syria and the quasi-independence of Kurdish Iraq have only accentuated the new phenomenon of Turkey's Kurds to see their future as lying with Turkey.

On the question of transformations expected from the state and what it might be able to achieve in the short term, one might consider devolution of central government's powers as in the Corsican example. Both France and Turkey are extremely resistant toward the idea of recognizing a population that could challenge their idea of a unique nation.

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807 Since its foundation, the Turkish republic has remained close to the French model in administrative, constitutional and legal terms. France like Turkey in order to create a strong and unified nation dismissed ethnic entities other than French. As a result, the Bretons and Savoyards for example, have been almost completely assimilated inside France. However, there are still two ethnic groups, the Basques and the Corsicans, who want to be defined as a distinct group, but who, I shall underline, are not comparable to
France has opted to grant the Assembly of Corsica broader rights than those of other regional assemblies on the French territory without ever mentioning the question of autonomy or federation, themes that the French government prefers not to raise. Indeed, Corsica currently enjoys extended decentralization in line with the decentralization law adopted under François Mitterrand in 1982.\footnote{See, among others: Savigear, Peter. “Separatism and Centralism in Corsica.” \textit{The World Today}, 36. 9 (1980): 351-355 URL: \url{http://www.jstor.org/stable/40395219}} What happened in Corsica does have a bearing on the French conception of the state, which is monolithic and centralized. This is why it might be interesting to use the Corsican example when attempting to analyze the Turkish state's treatment of the Kurdish movement. Until the Turkish constitution is thoroughly redrafted, a decentralization policy can be applied not only in the Kurdish regions but across the entire country. Otherwise, my interlocutors see and experience the state in which they live and operate as an authoritarian regime. This situation is most likely to pertain until their demands are met within a democratic framework. The response from the Turkish state to these demands is of crucial importance, as it will have direct repercussions on the trajectory of the Kurds and the Kurdish movement. If the response fails to meet Kurdish aspirations, there is a risk that the Kurds will revert to armed conflict.\footnote{The period following the snap elections of November 2015 has already confirmed this argument. As the Turkish state failed to address Kurdish demands violence has gained ground.}

\textit{The 2015 elections.}

The June 2015 elections were of the utmost importance in enabling the Kurdish movement to anchor itself permanently within the Turkish political system. To the extent that many analysts stressed that the Kurdish movement constitutes the only real opposition to the AK Party government in Turkey.\textsuperscript{812} The HDP was initially founded in 2012 to merge with the BDP in the aftermath of the municipal elections of March 2014.\textsuperscript{813} One should also remember that the idea of establishing a Kurdish political party for Turkey came initially from Öcalan.\textsuperscript{814} BDP's campaign during the 2014 elections had primarily focused on the rights of the Kurds and how these could be obtained within a constitutional framework. This strategy can be said to have secured the Kurdish nationalist vote in the region, but also represented a risk for the Kurdish movement to marginalize itself. Following the 2014 elections, Öcalan called upon the leaders and activists within the BDP to form and organize themselves under a new party that would no longer refer to a specific ethnic identity but address all of Turkey's concerns.\textsuperscript{815} The HDP has thus come into being with an aim to establish a platform encompassing all opposition forces as well as the claims of those individuals or groups who had previously been disadvantaged or marginalized vis à vis the dominant majority (politically the AK Party or ethnically the Turks). Therefore, the HDP consisted of Kurdish activists from all stripes but also appealed to a wider civil society including segments of the non Kemalist Turkish left.

The general drawback of Kurdish parties in Turkey is that they prefer to play an intermediary role rather than be a decisive authority in peace discussions. This places them in a fundamentally different position from that of the Sinn Fein activists, for example. When in the late 1990s talks had begun between London and the Northern Irish movement, it seemed that Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, managed to master the political

\textsuperscript{812} Peköz, Mustafa. “Sistemin iç politik dengelerini değiştirecek güç: HDP.” [HDP will change the internal balance of power] SendikaOrg RSS, March 19, 2015; “Alevi adaylar: AKP'yi durduracak tek güç HDP'dir.” [Alevi candidates: HDP is the only force to stop the AKP] Etkin Haber Ajansı | EHA, April 16, 2015.

\textsuperscript{813} In the March 2014 elections, BDP won 160 municipalities in Turkey.


\textsuperscript{815} For a different perspective, see: “Kadir İnanır: HDP'nin kuruluşu çok anlamlı.” [The foundation of HDP is promising] T24 | Culture & Art, October 29, 2013. İnanır is a very popular Turkish actor and director. Previously, he was a member of the wise-men delegation.
game in negotiations. In Turkey, although the legal, political movement has made great progress since the mid-1990s, its representatives still appear to remain weak in relation to the military wing of the Kurdish movement. Thus, the Kurdish political movement does not act as a decisive party in the discussions, particularly regarding the future of the Kurdish armed struggle. Most commonly, their declarations occur along the lines that the PKK is an independent organization, who decides for itself whether or not to disarm. Another feature of the Kurdish population in Turkey is that those who are believed to support the PKK vote for the HDP. For many years, Kurdish political parties have preferred a cautious approach by publicly rejecting this fact to escape state repression. Since the mid-2000s, however, legal Kurdish representatives have more openly recognized that the Kurdish movement, operating whether legally or otherwise, share a common social base.

The analogy between the HDP and the Sinn Fein can consequently only be taken this far. In Northern Ireland, as in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, armed resistance movements have emerged to fight, literally and figuratively, against an oppressor, in one case the United Kingdom, and the other, the republic of Turkey. There is evidently a temporal gap between the two movements. Nevertheless, one can note similar developments. In Ireland a simplistic view would assert that the armed conflict began in the late nineteenth century and ended with the definitive cessation of the IRA's armed struggle in 2005. In Turkey the Kurdish armed movement was more recent. It began in 1984, and despite several ceasefires since 1993 as well as the PKK's partial withdrawal of troops from Turkish territory in 1999, it has not yet officially ceased. A parallel can be drawn, for in both cases there has been a transition from a strictly military conception of national liberation to a more political conception of identity recognition. Furthermore, as political movements grew stronger in both cases, the armed component of the same movements started to pull back. In other words, the further a movement moves away from pursuing an armed campaign, the more it comes to channel its energy into the democratic political process.

The election campaign of 2015 was an important opportunity for Kurdish activists to test

the viability and credibility of their goal of Türkiyelileşme. First, it was decided that the Party would present itself as such rather than as independent candidates, unlike in 2007 and 2011. As of January 2015, the HDP had already started to receive positive feedback from Turkish civil society including many intellectuals, political activists, and artists who publicly declared support for the Kurdish party. The essence of their message was that the Kurdish party must be backed regardless of one's political affiliation because this will open the way for minority representation in the Parliament. The HDP responded to this public support by promising to become a party that secures peace and brings democracy in Turkey.

Finally, 7 June 2015 proved to be a historic landmark for the Kurdish movement: the HDP passed the 10 percent threshold (a requirement for parliamentary representation), scored over 13 percent of the total vote and earned 81 parliamentary seats becoming the third biggest political party in the Parliament. A such return to the parliamentary arena was fundamental to the growth of the Kurdish total social movement. In fact, Kurdish exclusion from political representation had proved to be no remedy for Turkey's democracy as well as the difficulties encountered by Kurdish activists. The less the Kurdish activists feel alienated from the political debate the more they are able to articulate their social and political demands.

On the national level, the HDP doubled its overall vote. Indeed, the number of people who voted for the Kurdish party increased from 3 million (its record before 2015) to over 6 million on 7 June 2015. It made a historic breakthrough in the big cities of Turkey. When one compares major Kurdish cities with Turkish metropoles, one realizes that the HDP has obtained nearly the same number of votes. Istanbul, Izmir, Mersin, Ankara and Adana have

818 Başlangıç, Celal. “HDP'ye oy vermek için HDP'li olmak gerekmiyor.” [You don't have to be a partisan to vote for the HDP] T24, March 26, 2015; “Fazıl Say'dan HDP çağrıısı.” [Fazıl Say calls for support for the HDP] Radikal, June 1, 2015 (Fazıl Say is a distinguished Turkish pianist and composer); “Adalet Ağaoğlu: Oyum HDP'ye.” [Adalet Ağaoğlu: I will vote for the HDP] Evrensel, May 25, 2015. (Adalet Ağaoğlu is a renowned Turkish author and playwright.)


brought over 1.82 million votes to the HDP while in the largest Kurdish cities such as Diyarbakır, Van, Mardin, Urfa and Antep the same party collected 1 730 000 votes. On this premise, to say that the HDP is solely a Kurdish party elected by the Kurds to represent the Kurds would be incorrect and fail to take into account these election results. Once again, wide support from within Turkish civil society played an important role in HDP's success. The reason for Turkish support for the HDP can be explained by several other reasons. Many analysts point to the oppositional character of these votes against the ruling AKP. Others see them as coming from the social, democrat elements of the electorate that had lost interest in the Republican People's Party (CHP) no longer feeling represented by it. In any case, all agree that their choice of HDP was motivated by the hope of establishing a sustainable peace via the parliamentary process.

The votes are divided between the Kurdish regions and the Turkish West and it is interesting to see how they are distributed. In 15 of the predominantly Kurdish regions, the Kurds turned away from the ruling AK Party and the HDP came first by winning more than 60 percent of the votes. In previous elections, the Kurdish party and the AK Party would share most of the votes, whereas this time the HDP eliminated the ruling AK Party in many places. In the symbolic Kurdish capital of Diyarbakır, the HDP won ten seats against one for the AKP: and in four other Kurdish regions such as Ağrı, Şırnak, Hakkari and Iğdır, the HDP won all the seats.

These results suffice to demonstrate the extent to which the HDP is rooted in the Kurdish regions and how the population in these areas have shown their commitment to the goals advanced by the HDP prior to elections. On another level of analysis, the support from the grassroots for the HDP leads me to think that the argument that the HDP owes its success due to distancing itself from the PKK does not reflect the reality of Kurdish society. Such arguments rather reflect some people’s desire to see the HDP distancing itself from the

PKK, when in fact this is not really the case. As mentioned earlier, the current conflicts in the Middle East, and in Syria in particular, have reinforced the PKK's position in the Kurdish regions as an important actor fighting the Islamic State. Besides, the HDP's electoral achievements in the predominantly Kurdish regions go hand in hand with AK Party's defeat in the same areas. One can see that the AK Party is clearly sanctioned within a Kurdish society perceived rather as conservative and this can be interpreted as a move to the left.\textsuperscript{825}

Opinion polls indicate that there are at least three reasons why the Kurds who had previously voted for the AK Party did not do so this time.\textsuperscript{826} The Roboski massacre seems to be the first reason. In this Kurdish village, 34 villagers were killed in a Turkish military bombing on 28 December 2011. The chairman of the Diyarbakır Bar Association Tahir Elçi declared legal support for the families of the deceased. In a press conference held in conjunction with other non-governmental organizations such as the İHD, CHD (Contemporary Lawyers' Association), TESEV (Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation) and under the monitoring committee of the Human Rights Watch (HRW), Elçi stated that Roboski was one of the most dramatic human rights violations that has taken place in Turkey during the past decade.\textsuperscript{827}

The second reason is the government's refusal to provide support to the Kurdish insurgents defending the city of Kobane against the Islamic State.\textsuperscript{828} And, the third reason is the sum of President Erdoğan's recent statements as: 'there is no Kurdish problem in Turkey.'\textsuperscript{829} These were evidently not the only reasons. Votes in favor of the HDP also provided an opportunity for the Kurds to assert themselves and their willingness to peacefully resolve the Kurdish


\textsuperscript{827} Diyarbakır Bar Association. Press Conference: Roboski’nin takipçisiyiz [We are in the pursuit of Roboski] Diyarbakır Barosu Bülten [Diyarbakır Bar Association Bulletin], 22 February 2013. Print. p. 29


\textsuperscript{829} “Erdoğan: Kürt sorunu yoktur, Kürtlerin bazı sorunları vardır.” [Erdoğan: There isn't such a thing as the Kurdish problem, the Kurds have some issues] Sahuah, May 2, 2015.
issue, which was the major election promise of the HDP. Voting for the HDP was therefore seen as a hope for peace.

McAdam and Tarrow emphasize the importance of elections in social movements, a dimension which has been overlooked by social movement scholars, including their colleague Charles Tilly. The authors' argument is that elections are an important part of the political process in which social movements evolve. The link between elections and movements as well as electoral outcomes might determine the dynamics of the movement in question.830 As Hutter and Kriesci rightly argue, 'social movements are integrally related to mainstream politics.'831

McAdam and Tarrow have theorized the impact that the “political parties rooted in movements” can exert on domestic politics. They further analyze the intersections between movements, parties and elections, proposing a new concept, electoral contention. Authors distinguish between processes through which we can link both movements and elections: 'electoral contention. Authors distinguish between processes through which we can link both movements and elections: [electoral contention. Authors distinguish between processes through which we can link both movements and elections:]

Elections as a 'tactic' apply to political parties that are active and rooted in social movements and are influential in shaping domestic politics, especially in functional multi-party systems as they can be part of coalition governments depending on election outcomes.833 The HDP gained political prominence in Turkey in exactly this way. The second, 'proactive' electoral mobilization, is when groups mobilize in specific electoral campaigns.834 Authors give the example of the Occupy movement as a social movement group that exerted influence on Obama's move toward populism in the 2012 presidential campaign.835 Proactive mobilization brings to mind those groups as the non Kemalist

830 McAdam and Tarrow. “Social Movements and Elections,” 328.
832 McAdam and Tarrow. “Social Movements and Elections,” 328.
833 McAdam and Tarrow. “Social Movements and Elections,” 329.
834 McAdam and Tarrow. “Social Movements and Elections,” 330.
835 Idem.
Turkish left, the LGBT and members of minorities who became active in the presidential election campaign of 2014 in favor of the Kurdish candidate.  

The third is 'reactive' electoral mobilization, which is usually the method used by protest movements in authoritarian states where elections are disputed. Elections as both pro-active and reactive electoral mobilization strategies can be seen in Turkey's Kurdish context. The Kurds' participation in Turkey's elections is seen as “resistance” particularly because of the national threshold imposed on political parties. Many Kurds also report that electoral fraud is widespread so they remain hugely reactive in the aftermath of elections.

The Kurds' electoral campaigns have reached a stage where elections overlap with their everyday social movement actions. In terms of pro-activeness we have seen different groups taking part in the electoral campaigns in favor of the HDP: and in terms of reactiveness, electoral results have been disputed in many villages and towns, especially between the ruling AK Party and the HDP candidates. Elections in Turkey's Kurdish context are a catalyst for protests against the perceived, non-democratic conducts of the government. The Kurdish movement's activity is deeply rooted in electoral politics as hypothesized by McAdam and Tarrow.

**Interdependency as a way to consolidate the power of civil society activism.**

Michael Heaney argues that 'social movement organizations often experience substantial advantages when they form identities that blend organizational categories.' The author calls this phenomenon *intermovement dependency*. The idea comes from the example of antiwar activists in the United States who connected with other movements such as *Women for Peace* over a collective cause, in this case, peace. According to the concept of intermovement dependency, different organizations come to collaborate and leave behind their singular agendas to reach out to wider audiences and achieve their goals together. It

837 McAdam and Tarrow. “Social Movements and Elections,” 330-331.  
839 Idem, p.1090-1091
seems intermovement collaboration both strengthens and adds to the aspect of civil society activism in my case study. Despite shortcomings, increasing collaboration among the mainstream and spin-off Kurdish political parties, religious and faith-based organizations as well as diverse ethnic and gender-oriented communities in Turkey can be noticed.

From 2011 onward, smaller Kurdish political parties such as the Association of Democratic and Revolutionary Culture (DDKD) and the Party for Rights and Freedoms (HAK-PAR), along with other civil society groups, had begun joining their efforts for a collective goal, spearheaded by the mainstream pro-Kurdish political party in Turkey (at the time, the BDP). During an interview with the head of the DDKD, he mentioned that they prioritized a unified Kurdish position in their politics. 840 In 2012, HAK-PAR, for example, had issued a common proposal with the BDP, focusing on the right to local autonomy and constitutional change in Turkey. 841 In a brochure I was given during fieldwork, one could see that the demands formulated by the HAK-PAR matched perfectly the demands of the more dominant BDP and others I have interviewed. 842

However, the formulation of the demands slightly differed from the rhetoric used by the pro-Kurdish party or the PKK in the resolution of the Kurdish question. It pointed out the positive steps, albeit palliative, undertaken by the Turkish government, especially since 2011 in view of Turkey's democratization. For the HAK-PAR, the conjectural transformations in the world, the gains made by Iraqi Kurds and the period of accession talks with the European Union led Turkey to reconsider its Kurdish problem. With the Kurdish opening, HAK-PAR believed that the Kurdish question was no longer a taboo in

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840 Personal recorded interview with the head of DDKD, conducted on 25 December 2015 in the premises of his association in Diyarbakır.


Turkey and social awareness on the subject had increased. The most striking point in HAK-PAR's declaration was that it proposed federalism as a unique solution to the Kurdish question. For Turkey to become a federal state in which Kurds and other minorities are granted equal rights as a people, HAK-PAR ardently favored the continuation of EU talks and the transition toward a decentralized system.

HAK-PAR came up with more specific demands: 'The Turkish state must apologize to the Kurds for its past mistakes; light has to be put on the extra-judicial killings of the past; the Diyarbakır prison should become a museum; economic growth is what urgently is needed in the Kurdish regions; the village guard systems should be lifted; Kurdish language should be allowed as a language of instruction and be recognized as mother tongue; violence has to be ended by both parties; a general amnesty should be declared and finally the constitution has to be rewritten.' From this perspective, one can argue that intermovement dependency might also have a positive effect in bringing about political unity and strengthening collective identity within a movement that was initially fragmented.

The DDKD took active part in the Preparatory Committee for Kurdish National Congress. In the words of my interviewee, the head of the DDKD, who was a member of this Committee, 'there are respectively members from all parts of Kurdistan: six from 'Northern Kurdistan' (Turkey); four from Rojava (Syrian Kurdish enclaves); one from Europe (the Kurdish diaspora); five from Başur (Iraqi Kurdistan), and five from Iranian Kurdistan.' My interviewee further informed this study that participants from 'Northern Kurdistan' consisted of one representative from the BDP, one from the Democratic Society Party (DTK), two from the PKK, one from DDKD and one from the Kurdish Democratic Platform (AZADI). Although, the Congress in question has been delayed since 2012 to an unknown date, visibly due to discrepancies still not overcome among Kurdish political parties on a regional level, the collectively put efforts still prove in a sense that a new

844 Party for Rights and Freedoms | Party Brochure, p.12-24  
845 This information has been provided to me during an interview with the head of DDKD, conducted on 25 December 2015 in the premises of his association in Diyarbakır.  
847 According to the HAK-PAR's monthly magazine Deng, the efforts to gather a national congress have been
collective stance has been realized through dependency between different political parties, which would previously have organized around different agendas.

Carroll and Ratner suggest that 'networks may involve many intersections of mutual support and cross-membership, fostering an interdependence that can provide a basis for concerted collective action.'" Civil activism and democracy advocacy in my case study combined an important cross-networking capacity. We can identify the congregation of the following organizations: anti-poverty (SARMAŞIK); environmentalist and infrastructure-building oriented (Chambers); women's rights (female branches within political parties and civil society organizations); religion (faith-based organizations and associations e.g., DİAY-DER and MAZLUM-DER), human rights (İHD and MAZLUM-DER), and language promotion (Nûbihar). These organizations are not a separate social movement, but constitute a collective social movement network linking anti-poverty, human rights, demands for peace, infrastructure and language promotion with the recognition of Kurdish identity as part of Turkey. Participants, who are active, more or less, in one or several of these organizations are tied to each other by virtue of their participation in a social movement organization with an overarching common goal, for example the rejection of violence. Cross-movement networking is present in the Kurdish social movement and allows activists from different backgrounds to share common grievances and a sense of collective identity.

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The national aspects

The Kurds in Turkey abandoned their traditional separate rhetoric in favor of advocating a common and “dignified”849 coexistence of both Kurds and Turks within a democratic, multi-ethnic and united Turkey. The Kurdish movement can be seen as opting for a more integrated way of mobilizing, leaving behind, to a very large extent, the armed struggle as well as revolutionary nationalist rhetoric. These shifts in turn imply other important transformations at the grassroots level, calling primarily into question the degree of their *interiorization* by the Kurds.

Particularly, constitutional recognition of the Kurdish identity came out as the ultimate priority of the Kurdish struggle. It was also the key to the realization of the demands of Kurdish activists such as achieving administrative local autonomy mainly through democratic channels. Turkey's current administrative system is highly centralized and dismissive of the country's regional and provincial nuances. My interviewees insisted on the possibility of proposing and developing a more democratic, decentralized, and perhaps a federal system, which they regarded as representative of all regions of Turkey, where, for example, governors can be elected locally rather than centrally appointed from Ankara.

The right to education in their mother tongue and the official use of the latter in public remained another crucial topic among Turkey's Kurds. In 2002, in tandem with the European Union's harmonization packages, the Turkish government had announced that languages other than Turkish could be used for private instruction and broadcasting.850 Subsequently, two state universities had begun to offer both undergraduate and graduate degree programs in Kurdish language and literature.851 Kurdish language schools could be established in areas where demanded, though still limited to private institutes. After long debates in the Parliament, a law regulating legal defense in mother tongue saw approval in

849 The emphasis by my interviewees on the word 'dignity' and restoring 'dignity.' See also: Okçuoğlu, Dilan. “Local peacebuilding in Turkey's Kurdish borderlands.” *Insight on Conflict*, June 11, 2015.
early 2013, permitting Kurdish-speaking prisoners to plead in Kurdish if they wished.\footnote{852} The current co-mayor of Diyarbakır, Fırat Anlı, in an interview given to the Diyarbakır Bar Association, of which he has been a member since 1993, evaluated this law as favorable despite its shortcomings such as the interpreter costs in defendant's charge and the fact that the use of mother tongue is not allowed in every stage of defense.\footnote{853}

At the turn of 2015 a state television channel broadcasting since 2009 entirely in Kurdish (and its various dialects) was renamed from TRT-6 to TRT-Kurdî.\footnote{854} However, these regulations have fallen short of the demands of Kurdish activists. In 2012, the International Crisis Group published a report addressing the Kurdish issue in view of its definitive solution in Turkey. The report said the majority of Kurds in Turkey refuse to compromise on their right to full education in their mother tongue.\footnote{855} My own empirical data has confirmed this conclusion. Kurdish activists within this study have expressed discontent with what they judge to be a series of “cosmetic” language reforms by the government and foster the full recognition of the Kurdish language in every platform possible.

Besides, nearly all my interlocutors voiced their demands for political freedoms and democratic rule. On the surface it might be said of my interviewees that they consider political freedoms as the liberty of organization, officially using the terms, Kurd and Kurdistan. However, deep down they aspire to break down a greater taboo that has prevailed in Turkey for a century. The mere fact of pronouncing the word Kurdistan was considered a major threat to the territorial integrity of the Turkish state and nation by larger segments of Turkish society, and not just at the state level.\footnote{856} In more practical terms,

\footnote{853} Anlı was arrested as part of the KCK operations and demanded to plead in Kurdish. After his release, he said using Kurdish language was an act of “pure” civil disobedience, who was first ill-conceived by his prosecutors whose attitude has now lost credibility. To consult the interview: Erkuş, Tuncay and Ayus Ramazan. “Interview with Fırat Anlı.” \textit{Diyarbakır Barosu Bülten [Diyarbakır Bar Association Bulletin]} Feb.-Mar. 2013. Print, p.18-22.
\footnote{854} “TRT changes its Kurdish channel name to TRT Kurdî.” \textit{Today's Zaman}, January 11, 2015.
\footnote{856} For a thorough analysis: Scalbert-Yücel, Clémence et Le Ray Marie. “Knowledge, ideology and power.
political freedoms meant the release of thousands of prisoners including political activists, journalists, mayors, other elected municipal officials, who for charges of “aiding and abetting a terrorist organization” or “menacing the indivisible integrity of the Turkish state with its Turkish nation” were barred from participating in political life.

From constitutional recognition to the right to some sort of bottom-up, administrative autonomy, whether termed as a federal Kurdish region within Turkey or benefitting from a possible decentralization of Turkey, to the authorization of education and public facilities in Kurdish (and in other minority languages of Turkey), to full exercise of political rights and liberties, all of these constituted the core of my interviewees' declarations about their activism. In other words, they identified themselves and their mobilization with these motives. Strikingly, my non-Kurdish interviewees including journalists, authors and/or other ordinary citizens, they too pursued very similar objectives. There seemed to be a consensus over the idea that the Kurds (or the Kurdish movement) represent the very potentiality for societal change in Turkey, because it was argued, they had the most dynamic base for collective action.

Referring to Tilly’s condition of identity shift through the example of Italian unification and Russian disintegration, one can make the case for activist Kurds who experienced an identity shift from belonging to a separate Kurdish ethnicity that was forcefully integrated to Turkish citizenship to belonging to a distinct Kurdish ethnicity, willingly integrated into Türkîyeli community (meaning to originate from Turkey). Passing from “Turk” to “Türkiyeli” facilitated the debates on the resolution of the Kurdish question as the Kurds along with others would belong to a (shared) territory and not to a (dominant) ethnie. The Turkish grammatical rule applied to specific regions (for example, Konyali for someone from the city of Konya etc.) can be applied for the country as a whole: calling people from Turkey as Türkîyeli and not necessarily as Turks. It can be argued that this leads to Renan’s concept of nation defined as 'a soul [and] a spiritual principle.'

According to his spiritual theory of nation, what makes a nation is a common or shared history in conjunction with the current consent of the people to live together as a whole: the presence of a historical

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857 Renan. “What is a Nation?” 1887.
collective memory is as important as 'the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of heritage.'

This desire to live together, and the will to perpetuate the value of heritage can be perceived to transcend real differences in language, religion, race, interests and geography. Renan's conceptualization of what makes Türkiyeli community would diverge significantly from the more traditional conceptualization of ethnic nationalisms as a political doctrine based on racial, linguistic, religious or geographical peculiarities. Renan's insistence on nations as a spiritual force, a foundation or cornerstone of national unity goes to exemplify the present-day desire of the Kurds for a unification as members of a Türkiyeli community, leaving behind past traumas. Today, parties seem to be partly blocked at both ideological and sentimental levels. The national, as one of Touraine's main pillars for a total social movement, is seen as inclusively national in the Kurdish total movement through the project of Türkiyelileşme.

Türkiyelileşme found support among the Turks.

There has been a significant change in perception within the Turkish society vis-à-vis the Kurds or the Kurdish movement from the peace process through 2015. That said, I do not suggest that we shall turn a blind eye on the fact that among diverse segments of the Turkish society there still exists a feeling of mistrust toward the Kurds or the Kurdish movement. The opposite is also true. Many Kurds assert that they do not trust the Turkish state. Second, despite its “democratization” discourse, the Kurdish movement seems to have an equivocating character as it does not completely dismiss violence at different stages of its existence. The latter phenomenon is particularly striking to observe, when legal Kurdish representatives in Turkey fail to coordinate between different moves coming out of İmralı island, where the jailed Öcalan is kept, and Qandil mountains in Northern Iraq, which is the notable base of the executive committee of the PKK. The opinion of the Turkish public on these matters has been varied. Whereas some see the Kurdish movement as a real or potential threat to the territorial integrity of the Turkish state, and therefore

858 Renan. “What is a Nation?” 1887.
reject any formulation with an ethnic dimension (with the fear of its being “uncontrollable” in the future), others prove to be more receptive to the plight of Kurds, and sometimes even stick up for Kurdish rights on different platforms. These sum up to sharp variations in opinion ranging from considering the Kurds as the weakest link in Turkey's progress to the belief that the Kurds are the utmost guarantor of possibly attaining a fully functioning democracy in Turkey despite all of its current shortcomings. Moreover, significant shifts can be observed in Turkish public opinion according to the country's changing political conjuncture and particularly during election campaigns.\textsuperscript{860}

All in all, this perception change resulted in more resonance and support for the Kurdish rights within the framework of Turkey's democratization particularly in the last few years.\textsuperscript{861} A Turkish labor party activist encountered within this study underlined that 'the Turkish state had left the Kurds out in the periphery without any resources but policies of discrimination, a fact which was largely ignored until recently.'\textsuperscript{862} He continued: ‘There is nothing more normal for them [the Kurds] to revolt, and for us [he defines his circles to be leftist, progressive] to endorse their cause today.'\textsuperscript{863} Indeed, the democratization discourse adopted by Kurdish activists and political representatives (within the context of a total social movement), particularly in the last three years, found an echo within the wider Turkish public and civil society. This has led to what one might call as a change in mindset toward “the Kurdish people and their struggle” laying the grounds for many Turkish democrats, leftists, labor activists and intellectuals alike to better question the actual state paradigm (a homogeneous, nationalist Turkey) and how it never quite embraced the Kurds. Indeed, it would have been more difficult to imagine (ethnic) Turks supporting the Kurdish movement or cause today had they continued to perceive the Kurds as a violent entity, striving toward Turkey's territorial disintegration.

Another perfect example for perception changes followed prior to the presidential elections

\textsuperscript{860} Examples for this kind of shift are provided in the previous section about elections.
\textsuperscript{862} Fieldwork notes on the basis of my recorded interview with a member of Turkish Labor Party of Turkish origin, conducted on 13 July 2013 in his home.
\textsuperscript{863} Idem.
in August 2014. Both Gezi and the corruption scandal had diminished the Turkish people's faith in their government, increasing distrust against “moderate Islamists.” This political polarization, coupled with the general uncertainty about the Kurdish peace process as well as the perceived incapacity of mainstream Turkish opposition parties in terms of dealing with the country's political affairs, sparked off other dynamics in Turkey's political arena. A Kurd, and co-president of the HDP, previously BDP presented himself as a presidential candidate with the promise of building an “alternative” Turkey. It turned out nearly 10 percent of Turkey's voters casted their ballots for the Kurdish candidate,\footnote{Ete, Hatem. “Demirtaş kimden oy aldı?” [Who voted for Demirtaş?] Aksam, August 21, 2014. Accessed January 20, 2015. http://www.aksam.com.tr/yazarlar/hatem-ete/demirtas-kimden-oy-aldi/haber-333004} making of this presidential campaign one of the utmost stages of a total social movement and its nuanced project, Türkiyeleşme. For the first time in decades, the Kurds, via their representatives, were able to address wider Turkish audiences, conveying their demands for constitutional recognition, which they deemed was possible in a transformed Turkey only.
Specifically from 2000 onward until 2015, the Kurdish social movement underwent several important and ostensibly paradoxical phases. At times it has been a movement with nationalist overtones, concentrating all its efforts on strict identity politics and the “salvation” of the historically oppressed Kurdish lands and identity. This became extremely visible every time national and legislative elections took place as well as in the aftermath of the detention or arrest of Kurdish political activists for their alleged support for or link with “PKK terrorism.” The hardcore nationalist dimension of the movement could also be observed during the guerrilla or civilian funerals, by slogans protesters chanted, and the symbols, flags and pictures they displayed. These events seemed to impact the Kurds’ “wounded” national sentiments deeply. At times the PKK guerrillas organized attacks against the Turkish military due to their perceived lack of the government's will and political steps to solve the conflict and under the pretext that the Turkish army pursued military activities. Despite these, the 2013 peace process was still more or less able to develop based on a fragile but mutual consensus, for a period of two years, giving the impression that it could finally be time for peace and that military options could gradually be eliminated.

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865 Paradoxes in a movement's discourse and practices could further be understood from an instrumentalist perspective, as suggested in the following quote: 'Political actors use violence to achieve multiple, overlapping, and sometimes mutually contradictory goals.' Zuckerman, S. Alan “Advancing Explanation in Comparative Politics: Social Mechanisms, Endogenous Processes, and Empirical Rigor.” In Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure, edited by Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, 72-96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. p.84


868 Jenkins, Gareth. “PKK changes battlefield tactics to force Turkey into negotiations.” The Jamestown Foundation, October 24, 2007. Accessed July 14, 2012.; Another interpretation would be according to Tezcür, who asserted that the Kurdish movement did not lay down arms as a result of a calculation for hegemonic influence in the Kurdish regions. Tezcür's argument is that democratization attempts are not always sufficient to end conflicts. Tezcür, “When Democratization Radicalizes,” 2010.

As what is said does not always match with what is done, at times, while such discourses were being pronounced, other trends could also make their voice heard under the roof of the same movement, when proponents of military solutions publicly praised the armed campaign of Kurdish guerrillas, the “absolute” rightness of their cause, and so the imperative for continuing to challenge the state mechanisms strictly with this mindset. Whether it is the public praise for armed insurgency or merely the continuing existence of armed groups that has led to such contradictory discourses within the movement is debatable, but it is certain that this creates great confusion within the Kurdish social movement parameters, particularly at the grassroots level, but also from the perspective of observers.

What might distinguish the Kurdish movement from more generalizable (total) social movement theories is indeed its particular historical and current context, infused with unfulfilled nationalist sentiments and aspirations as well as the element of militancy in terms of the armed struggle component of the movement. The impact of the Kurdish armed struggle, which cannot be overlooked, on the mobilization of ‘above-ground’ activities of the Kurdish movement is a particularity which might not be found in other social movement contexts and therefore an amendment to the general literature on social movements can be suggested.

The impact of Kurdish military activities has proved to be vital in the Kurdish movement, and has often constituted the driving force of grassroots social movement participation. To cite one example, the most important mobilization of ordinary Kurds in the region can be seen to have taken place in the aftermath of a clash between the Turkish army and Kurdish guerrillas for the occasion of guerrilla funerals. Thousands of people gather in what is but a single, disorganized, random meeting. People in large numbers (men, women, elderly,


youth) seemingly highly organized, with colors, flags, and slogans, demonstrate that they are a side in this conflict. During this kind of protests and others, they show how committed they are to keeping up their movement.

On these premises, it would not be an exaggeration to think of the aforementioned social movement performances as being fundamentally animated with the same political spirit as that of the PKK, its affiliated organizations, supporters and sympathizer community. Indeed, activists in most social movement performances seem to incorporate most of what the PKK says and does. This can be explained by two interrelated reasons. The first stems from the fact that the PKK is considered to be the most credible Kurdish organization in the region. It gained credibility throughout the 1980s and the 1990s by a resistance in the Turkish jails and armed insurgency in the Kurdish mountains. It was quite commonplace to hear during fieldwork that, “if it were not for the PKK's struggle (referring to armed struggle) the world would not have known about us [the Kurds].”872 The second is that, the PKK gradually eliminated or weakened other Kurdish challengers and political parties in the region or, from a different viewpoint, unlike the PKK, these groups failed to address Kurdish grassroots effectively. Therefore, it would be wrong to look at the dynamics of the Kurdish movement, irrespective of this context in which the PKK is the main actor. Yet, this is the very point where generic social movement theories under current study are put to a test: the social movement in the Kurdish case seems to grow in the shadow of the PKK, whose agenda of action is steered largely by the PKK.

During my visits in the premises of the AK Party in December 2013, the AK Party Diyarbakır representative disapproved the BDP's line for pursuing 'strict identity politics.'873 He said that Kurdish activists were pushed to mobilize around the single axis of identity i.e., ethnic identity. And he continued: 'the BDP needs to stop opposing the government in the way they do when there are concrete signs of peace. Indeed, we must appreciate the

872 Fieldwork notes on the basis of my encounters, interviews and participant observation. Among others: personal recorded interview with a Kurdish activist, lawyer and member of DTK's constitution commission, conducted in his workplace 18 December 2013, Diyarbakır. Personal written interview with a young Kurdish activist, employee in the Children and Youth Center of Diyarbakır on 2 January 2014 in a book store in central Diyarbakır. Personal recorded interviews with two Kurdish activists – one lawyer and one retired teacher – in the premises of BDP headquarters, Diyarbakır.

873 Personal interview with AK Party's Diyarbakır representative in the premises of the AK Party building on 4 January 2014.
moment when our children are not dying, be they Turkish soldiers or Kurdish guerrillas. From a very relevant point, many soldiers serving in the Turkish army are Kurdish; and, to a numerically lesser extent, there are ethnic Turks in the ranks of the PKK. This statement would have struck anyone, and not just myself, had they not interviewed the BDP activists on similar issues already. The BDP activists mentioned several times to me that the discourse such as “our children are not dying” alone cannot be a pretext to resolve the Kurdish question. Kurdish activists do not content themselves with the absence of clashes between the Turkish army and the PKK.

Considering these, this study remains challenging through the lens of the total social movement theory. On one hand, it is possible to argue that the Kurdish movement functions by its non-violent, civil practices as a total social movement, yet on the other hand, its performances seem to be motivated, and often times determined by the PKK's political agenda and the pragmatic cycle in which they all operate. For instance, unemployment, poverty or lack of infrastructures or services are exceptionally elevated in the region. There are problems rooted in “bad” municipal governance in areas of public transportation, waste collection and green spaces. Kurdish activists or those ordinary Kurds do not mobilize for these matters. It can be argued that this is because the PKK does not mobilize grassroots for such matters. I call this phenomenon “the failure of the social” in the Kurdish social movement. To further substantiate my argument, other important examples can be given. In women's demonstrations, gender-oriented demands second calls for Öcalan's freedom. During Civil Fridays Kurdish activists and devout Muslims primarily called for Öcalan's liberty. My interviews with religious activists have confirmed that they were keen to pray in the biggest squares of their city every Friday to protest against the state-sponsored mosques and promote to their audiences Öcalan's idea of a democratic Turkey as the sole solution to the Kurdish question.

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874 Personal interview with AK Party's Diyarbakır representative in the premises of AK Party building, on 4 January 2014.


876 Source: Focus group and interview data, collected by myself on the basis of our discussion with a dozen of
A way to overcome this challenge had been to examine those hidden factors driving Kurdish activists and ordinary citizens to mobilize. Given the inductive nature of my research project, I thought it would be a mistake to argue that social actors act solely on behalf of a political agenda. If they take to the streets in the pursuit of changing something, this shall provide further insights about their movement. Kurdish activists as well as ordinary citizens add new dimensions to the movement in which they participate with their own personal stories of poverty, unemployment or discrimination. As much as they seem to consider the PKK's agenda relevant to their movement, there is certainly more to be taken into account when this is expressed collectively and in public.

The June 2015 elections as well as the recent history of the Kurdish movement highlight one important point: the Kurdish movement in Turkey remains extremely mobilized and organized. While part of the Kurdish movement continues to keep their faith with mountains and the necessity to have armed power, others are completely implanted in civil society and Turkey's politics in general. The second fringe, which is at the center of current developments, allows me to conclude that Kurds are a stakeholder in Turkish society and state mechanisms. Evidence of this includes otherwise very rare occurrence of Turkish flags during public gatherings and rallies organized by Kurds activists in their regions and across Turkey, both prior to and in the aftermath of elections. For long years, advocating for the Kurdish cause meant rejection of all forms of belonging to Turkish identity. The appearance of Turkish flags and posters of Ataturk in various Kurdish demonstrations epitomized the path taken by the Kurdish movement in its quest for Türkiyelileşme.

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877 religious activists in the premises of DİAY-DER, Diyarbakır on 5 and 6 December 2013.
878 Idem.
Conclusion

An introduction and five chapters later, I keep asking myself about the nature of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. This may sound inept coming from a researcher who has devoted four years of her life to study that question. Yet, it is only a reflection of the difficulty, complexity and ambivalence of the object of present study. The empirical evidence suggests that the Kurdish question is a vibrant, living issue. “Living” in the sense that it has spanned many eras since the mid-nineteenth century, changing shape and composition but remaining of major preoccupation for most Kurds as well as the authorities of different states among which they have been divided. To this day, Turkey asserts that the Kurdish question is the most important question it faces, and without its resolution no other significant progress can be made.

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to place a vibrant, living movement that may change any time – as the Kurdish movement – into a theoretically rigid category. It is constantly evolving to suit the geo-strategic and political changes in the region or according to changes in governments or owing to external or international support brought to the Kurds. As a result, it is a movement whose fluidity does not easily lend itself to any specific category.

*Outlining each of my findings.*

This thesis represented a transition from political science to sociology by exploring nationalism and social movement theories in the case of the Kurdish movement. I studied the development of the latter from the foundation of the Turkish republic in 1923, albeit with a focus on the recent period between 2000 and 2015. In the first chapter I examined the complex intersection between nationalism and social movement theories. To gain a broader perspective, I reviewed the ethnic mobilization of a different people, the Kosovo Serbs, from a social movement perspective based on the work undertaken by Nebojša Vladisavljević. I also explored Charles Tilly and his colleagues' program of contentious politics as a way of understanding how nationalist struggles, revolutions and wars were all part of the process of contention. The first chapter ended with my own contribution to these
debates, where I argued that nationalist movements are likely to become social movements when the political context in which they operate has become more receptive to their demands, and when they have achieved some or most of their initial objectives. The Basque, Northern Irish and Kurdish examples substantiated this argument and enriched the flow of this part of the thesis.

In the second chapter I investigated the historical foundations of the Kurdish people’s struggle for cultural and political identity in Turkey. This was indispensable for contextualizing the recent aspirations of Kurdish activists whom I observed and interviewed throughout this research. I studied the traditional Kurdish revolts in this section under the light of nationalism and ethnicity, because of the severely closed political environment in which they took place, preventing the development of a social movement in the early years of the Turkish republic. My general finding was that the Kurdish people skipped the stage of becoming a state before attaining a collective consciousness as a national entity.

In the third chapter my examination of Kurdish nationalist activity continued with a focus on the period between 1960 and 2000. I found that elements of a proto-social movement could be identified during the mobilization of Kurdish activists for social justice and economic equality through the Eastern meetings in the late 1960s. My reading of history showed that because the Turkish state did not meet the demands of Kurdish activists, the initial phases of what could eventually become a permanent Kurdish social movement were unable to develop. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, we witnessed the creation of political parties, civil society organizations and informal networks with an explicit Kurdish agenda, which constituted in this study the social movement bases of the Kurdish movement post-2000.

In this light, in the fourth chapter I placed the dynamics of the contemporary Kurdish movement within a framework of social movements. My main finding was that nationalism and ethnicity alone did not suffice to explain these dynamics, hence I turned to the three pillars of social movement theory: political opportunity structures, resource mobilization and collective identity. I was able to draw attention to the importance of, inter alia, shifting
political opportunities for Turkey's Kurds between 2000 and 2013 with Turkey's EU candidacy, shifting military and civil relations, and the inspirational impact of the embryonic phases of the Arab spring. This was followed by an exploration of how activists were able to capitalize on these opportunities, with an illustration of the nuanced character of the Kurdish movement, with its strong articulations of collective identity, rooted in its nationalist past.

In the fifth and final chapter I focused on the passage of the Kurdish movement from a social movement to a total social movement. This was a new departure in Kurdish studies, which as far as I am aware have not previously analyzed the Kurdish movement from such a perspective. The chapter focused on the period between 2013 and 2015 when the Kurdish decision to operate within and in opposition to the established framework of the Turkish state reached a peak with three major events: the declaration of the 2013 peace process between the Turkish state, the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan; the candidacy of a Kurdish activist (president of the Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, BDP) to run for the Presidency; and the break through by Kurdish candidates from the People's Democracy Party HDP in crossing the world's highest and most undemocratic electoral threshold of 10 percent in the June 2015 general elections.

**The Kurdish movement in Turkey as a total social movement.**

Central to Touraine's approach, as it has been to mine, is the process in which social actors identify themselves with their claims and demands in opposition to an adversary as part of a historical project. When this project contains three interrelated dimensions – social, political and national – Touraine posits the emergence of a total social movement. He draws his theory from the case of the Solidarity movement that emerged in Poland in early 1980. Solidarity presented itself as a total social movement by being (a) simultaneously trade-unionist with the strikes of workers whose numbers had reached 10 million; (b) nationally-driven as Solidarity's goal was to cast aside the party regime at the national level against the Soviet union; and (c) democracy-advocating as it insisted on the creation of independent unions, freedom of speech and association.
According to Touraine's logic, this movement was able to survive between 1980 and 1981 as it also stayed loyal to its original dynamics, resisted committing to an overarching ideology whilst also opting for non-violent resistance.

Based on Touraine's theoretical framework, this study has argued that, particularly from 2013 through to 2015 the Kurdish movement in Turkey functioned as a total social movement by virtue of its capacity to combine civil society activism and the promotion of democracy with the articulations of a national identity, the nucleus of which had never receded. During this time frame, the Kurdish movement engaged in a peace process, channelled its energy into civil society activism and broader electoral campaigns, promoted the idea of a fully functioning democracy, and ultimately an inclusive understanding of national identity for all the components of Turkish society, and not just the Kurds, via a project of Türkiyelileşme [Turkeyfication].

**Kurdish total social movement mitigated by external elements.**

If between 1925 and the present the Kurdish movement in Turkey has experienced various upheavals that led me to consider that it has evolved from a purely nationalist movement toward a total social movement, the year 2015 was a chance to check whether or not this passage from “national” to “social” was definitive. It has been rich in events since two elections were held in less than 6 months and armed clashes have resumed between the PKK and the Turkish army since November 2015.

The June 2015 elections have shown that the discourse of the Kurdish movement had a certain echo in Turkish society since the pro-Kurdish party, HDP has obtained over 13 percent of the vote. Moreover, what was striking was that the number of votes obtained by the Party in Western Turkey was almost similar to that obtained in the Eastern Kurdish regions. This was proof of the extent to which the Kurdish movement was involved in Turkey as a whole, marking the trajectory and evolution of the Kurdish movement in Turkey.

Traditionally the Kurdish movement, as are many other movements with identity claims, is
seen as a regional movement, or at least geographically delimited. This traditional view is also commonly shared by those who see the Kurdish movement as a strictly national movement. The 2015 election results came to contradict this view by demonstrating that the ideas promoted by the HDP were supported in the Kurdish regions and other parts of Turkey. For example, Istanbul, Izmir, Adana, Ankara, Mersin were cities in which the HDP has seen its votes increase.

One should add however that in this context many of the HDP votes in Turkish cities came from the Kurdish population living in those cities. In itself, this does not change much in my analysis. For various reasons the Kurdish issue has spread to the whole of Turkey and is no longer an issue that can be geographically limited to the Kurdish regions. By force of circumstance, the majority of Kurds who live in the West usually migrated there due to the repressive policies adopted by successive Turkish governments in their initial regions, resulting in the Kurdish issue moving outside of its pre-assumed geographical limits. This is not inconsequential in the transformation of the logic of the Kurdish struggle and has played a key role in the discourse of Türkiyelileşme.

As I have previously asserted, the overwhelming majority of my interviewees declare that they are capable of redefining the status of the Kurds within the Turkish republic, provided that it becomes more democratic as they prefer to remain within Turkey. This vision put forward by Kurdish activists along with my readings of traditional media sources and analysis of Kurdish political speeches before and during the 2015 elections led me to draw the following conclusion: secessionism refers to the geographical delineation of a national question, while social acceptance of the same question leads to a geographically unbounded vision, in a region that is ethnically dominated by the Kurds, a group which has been historically oppressed. In other words, if geographically delineating the Kurdish question can lead to secessionism and, or, nationalism, considering the Kurdish issue as a Turkish one forces the Kurdish movement to depart from these conceptions: at least this is what has been the case over the past 15 years. However, after the snap elections of November 2015, this context has shifted.
The November 2015 elections and the weakening of Türkiyelileşme. Türkiyelileşme has been a persisting yet fragile movement. In the snap elections that took place at the time of writing the HDP received approximately 5 million votes. This represented a marginal decrease in support for the Party from 13 to 10.7 percent. Despite this decline, the HDP still succeeded in having their candidates elected in both Kurdish and Turkish regions. It was nevertheless precarious. Between the June and November 2015 elections, there was a resumption of violence between the Turkish forces and the PKK, which spilled into urban areas. This had a negative impact on public opinion of the HDP, and undermined the Kurdish movement's overall position as a total social movement. Commentators suggested that the HDP's loss in the share of votes was related to these clashes. Turkish voters who had initially been attracted to the discourse of Türkiyelileşme were deterred from supporting it due to its inability to distance itself from the armed activities politically.

Touraine stresses that violence is a red line in the criteria to qualify as a total social movement. Once this line is crossed, no matter how many of the other criteria it possesses it cannot be considered as a total social movement. Consequently, the period of armed clashes in the 1990s demonstrated the domination of armed resistance over the social aspects of the Kurdish movement and therefore could not be classed as a total social movement. On the contrary, between 2000 and 2015, there was less emphasis on violent struggle, and more energy was devoted to civil protest including petitions, sit-ins, press conferences, silent marches and vigils, meaning the movement could be defined as a social one. A total social movement flourishes in a peaceful context, a climate of confrontation invites adversaries to engage in a more nationalist and secessionist discourse, consequently limiting its legitimacy as a total social movement.

As such 2015 was a pivotal year for the Kurdish movement. It impacted how observers and researchers defined the movement in general. External factors such as what has been occurring in Syria since 2011 must also be taken into account when analyzing the dynamics of the Kurdish movement in Turkey.
The Syrian conflict: a disruptive element in the Kurdish total social movement.

The escalation in the Syrian conflict since 2011 has impacted the Kurdish movement's efforts for the democratization of Turkey. Over time, Syrian Kurds have succeeded in achieving a de facto autonomy within areas in Syria where they constitute the majority of the population by declaring a neutral position vis à vis the confrontation between the Syrian regime and the Free Syrian Army. Early in March 2016, a new group by the name of Federation of Northern Syria was declared following the unification of three Kurdish cantons.

This had a direct impact on the expectations of the Kurds in Turkey. Historically the Kurds of Syria and the Kurds of Turkey have a strong bond. Syrian Kurds were separated from their Kurdish brethren in Turkey in the late 1930s during an exchange of territory between Turkey and Syria (France overseeing the whole), and the current border was established in 1938. Nevertheless, the plight of the Syrian Kurds directly affects the ambitions of the Kurds in Turkey. Therefore, any type of recognition whether territorial, national or ethnic obtained by the Kurds in Syria will be experienced by the Kurds in Turkey much like something obtained for themselves.

Another strong connection between the Kurds of Turkey and the Kurds in Syria is their political link: in both countries, the Kurdish political spectrum is dominated by the PKK. Thus, it is the same movement that determines, or at least is involved in the determination of, Kurdish political choices. Herein lies the dilemma: can a political party using military action and driven by a nationalist ideology in Syria at the same time reject nationalist separation and support non-violent inclusive social reform in Turkey?

The Kurdish movement in Turkey passes through a period of fluctuations, oscillating between its social aspects developed in the last 15 years and its nationalistic spirit that led it to rise up more than 29 times in the last two centuries. Despite the armed conflict since the summer of 2015, Kurdish civil society still affirms that it wants to remain a part of Turkey. Although their discourse towards the Turkish state has become more critical, and they accuse the Turkish government of being “colonialist” and “dictatorial” yet this does not
seem to mean that they are in favor of separation from Turkey but the democratization of
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