

KURDISH URBAN POLITICS IN THE NEOLIBERAL ERA:
CASES OF DIYARBAKIR AND VAN MUNICIPALITIES MOBILIZED UNDER
BDP

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Thesis Abstract

Bilgesu Sümer, “Kurdish Urban Politics in the Neoliberal Era: Cases of Diyarbakir and Van Mobilized under BDP”

This thesis explores why urban politics became integral for Kurdish movement and how Kurdish movement mobilizes municipalities by examining the cases of Diyarbakir and Van whose municipalities are run by the political party of Kurdish movement, BDP. This study contextualizes the ongoing conflict with neoliberal transformations at the local government level in Turkey. Furthermore, it analyzes the extent to which the motivating factors and reasons for local politics are realized while mobilizing municipalities; given the structural constraints of the conflict and neoliberalism. To address this question, the life trajectories, experience and mobilization of the local actors and activists within their urban localities and local institutions are investigated through ethnography and in depth interviews.

This research is an ethnographic fieldwork on an urban social movement with popular composition struggling to steer the wheel of urbanization which occurred ever so rapidly since the 1990s. It is based on my personal engagement and immersion into local activists spheres at the urban localities. It studies two urban localities: Diyarbakir and Van. The argument of the thesis is that local politics became central to Kurdish actors because the experience in mobilizing municipalities have given them the opportunity to address grievances – mostly developed due to the conflict. Meanwhile the project of Democratic Autonomy has given them a field in which how they want to mobilize local governments could be articulated and would be constituted. In this sense, Kurdish movement as a popular urban movement is situated against ill-effects of neoliberalism and is mindful of the conflict and would like to determine the collective consumption at the local and regional level through participatory mechanism to counter problems induced by both contexts.

Tez Özeti

Bilgesu Sümer, “Kurdish Urban Politics in the Neoliberal Era: Cases of Diyarbakir and Van Mobilized under BDP”

Bu tez neden kent siyasetinin Kürt hareketi için merkezi olduğunu ve Kürt hareketinin belediyeleri nasıl idare ettiğini, Kürt hareketini temsil eden BDP tarafından yönetilen Diyarbakır ve Van örneklerini üzerinden inceler. Bu araştırma devam etmekte olan Kürt sorunu ile Türkiye’de yerel yönetimlerdeki neoliberal dönüşümlerle birlikte bağlamlaştırır. Ayrıca, Kürt sorunun ve neoliberalizmin yapısal kısıtlamaları dâhilinde, bu belediyelerin yönetilirken yerel siyasete katılmaya motive eden faktörlerin ve sebeplerin ne ölçüde gerçekleştirildiğini analiz eder. Bu sorulara yanıt verebilmek için, yerel aktörlerin ve aktivistlerin hayat hikâyeleri, deneyimleri ve örgütlenmeleri etnografi ve derinlemesine mülakatlarla araştırılmaktadır.

Bu araştırma 1990’lardan beri oldukça hızlı şekilde kentleşmenin yaşandığı bir bölgede, kentleşmenin yönünü tayin edebilmek için mücadele eden, halk tabanlı bir kentsel toplumsal hareketin üzerine yapılmış etnografik bir saha araştırmasıdır. Benim yerel aktivist çevrelerine kentsel mekânlarda katılmamım üzerine kurulmuştur. İki kentsel mekânı incelemektedir: Diyarbakır ve Van. Bu tezin iddiası yerel siyaset Kürt aktörleri için merkezi olmuştur çünkü belediyeleri idare etme deneyimleri onlara – çoğu Kürt sorunu çevresinde gelişmiş olan – şikâyetlerini giderebilmek için fırsat vermiştir. Bir yandan da, Demokratik Özerklik projesi de onlara yerel yönetimleri nasıl idare etmek istediklerine dair hem ifade edebilecekleri bir alan hem de bunun nasıl yapılacağına dair imkân sağlamıştır. Bu açıdan, kentsel temelli bir halk hareketi olarak, Kürt hareketi neoliberalizmin olumsuz etkilerine karşı konumlanmıştır ve sorunun gerçekliğine dikkat etmektedir ve de iki bağlamdan da orta çıkan problemleri çözebilmek için yerel ve bölgesel seviyede katılımcı mekanizmalarla kitlesel tüketimin belirleyicisi olmak istemektedir.

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I have conducted this research and undertaken this thesis to understand the dynamics of a grassroots mobilization with popular composition through their own perspectives and intersubjective spheres of conduct. The topic I chose is very intricate and painful. The Region is zone of low intensity warfare. Death is the daily ritual of politics. Kurdish conflict has been the central political issue since the 1980s affecting millions in unimaginable ways. And as the conflict lingers, hope for solution is dimmed. In spite of these challenges, I believe I have done an integral work through an academic perspective to bring together the voice with the demands. I have also critically approached to the local activists of BDP, especially in terms of class affiliations and projects of political economy. I have done this as a student of political science. However as a citizen of Turkey, I support the demands of the local actors of BDP in terms of their historical grievances due to the persecution of their identity and repression of their political organizing. I urge the government to heed to these wishes, cease hostile actions against community organizers and approach these actors as partners – not as enemies or juvenile citizens – to initiate a perpetual peace. I insist that local actors of BDP to consider their affinity towards neoliberal urban development trajectories and flexible labor regime. I hope that the reign of terror would soon come to an end and millions would reunite with their loved ones; whether dead, missing, exiled, imprisoned, runaways or militants. The traumatic events of the past need long periods to be reconciled with and our society simply lacks the luxury to deny it furthermore.

I dedicate this thesis to Emma Sarya, Aram and Zerya Zin. My only wish is to see them united with loved ones and grow in solidarity and peace. And I cannot wait to watch them grow.

CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	viii
CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION.....	1
Kurds and Conflict in Turkey.....	4
Kurdish Actors in Electoral and Local Politics.....	8
Kurdish Movement as a Popular Urban Social Movement.....	18
Urbanization, Neoliberalism and Municipal Reform in Turkey.....	24
Urban Trajectories and Municipal Services of Diyarbakir and Van.....	30
Argument and the Structure of the Thesis.....	39
CHAPTER II : RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS.....	43
The Research Design.....	44
Methods.....	48
Mode of Analysis.....	54
Addressing the Research Questions in the Following Chapters.....	63
CHAPTER III : LIFE TRAJECTORIES AND THE PATH TO ELECTION.....	65
Beginning from the End: the Cause and Geography.....	67
Before the 1980 Coup, PKK, the Conflict and the Forced Displacement.....	71
Seeing, Witnessing and Experience.....	78
The Aftermath of Forced Displacement: Collective Urbanization.....	87
Getting Elected.....	96
Administrative Reform and Collective Consumption.....	111
Conclusion.....	115
CHAPTER IV : KURDISH URBAN POLITICS IN THE NEOLIBERAL ERA...	118
Kurdish Urban Politics.....	121
Countering Neoliberalism.....	133
Conclusion.....	150
CHAPTER V : CONCLUSION.....	153
APPENDIX.....	161
REFERENCES.....	173

ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Justice and Development Party	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi
ANAP	Motherland Party	Anavatan Partisi
BDP	Peace and Democracy Party	Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi
CHP	Republican People's Party	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi
DDKO	Eastern Revolutionary Culture Hearths	Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları
DEHAP	Democratic People's Party	Demokratik Halk Partisi
DEP	Democracy Party	Demokrasi Partisi
DSP	Democratic Left Society	Demokratik Sol Parti
DTP	Democratic Society Party	Demokratik Toplum Partisi
ECHR	European Court on Human Rights	
EU	European Union	
EZLN	The Zapatista Army of National Liberation	Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional
FP	Virtue Party	Fazilet Partisi
GABB	Union of Municipalities of South East Anatolia	Güneydoğu Anadolu Belediyeler Birliği
GÖÇ-DER	Association of Culture and Social Solidarity with Migrants	Göç Edenlerle Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Kültür Derneği
HADEP	People's Democracy Party	Halkın Demokrasi Partisi
HEP	People's Labor Party	Halkın Emek Partisi
İHD	Human's Right Association	İnsan Hakları Derneği
KCK	Union of Communities in Kurdistan	Komala Civaken Kurdistan
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party	Partiya Demokrata Kurdistanê
KESK	The Confederation of Public Workers' Unions	Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu
KUK	Kurdistan National Liberationists	Kurdistan Ulusal Kurtuluşçuları
PKK	Kurdistan Workers Party	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê
RP	Welfare Party	Refah Partisi
SHP	Social Democratic Populist Party	Sosyaldemokratik Halkçı Parti
TİP	Worker's Party of Turkey	Türkiye İşçi Partisi
TMMOB	Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects	Türk Mühendis ve Mimar Odaları Birliği
TOKİ	Housing Development Administration of Turkey	Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı
UDG	National Democratic Union of Forces	Ulusal Demokratik Güç Birliği

PREFACE

My grandfather used to be clerk for the State of Kurdistan of the Ottoman Empire. Back then, the Silk Road was the border between Armenia and Kurdistan. The Road passed from Van. The north of Van was Armenia and the south was Kurdistan.¹

For reasons that may be loosely described as ‘political’, any attempt to define what exactly the Kurds are, where they live or even what languages they speak is fraught with controversy. It is simply not possible to obtain scholarly unanimity on these basic questions. But, if politics prevents unanimity, this should not prevent a kind of scholarly consensus on these problems.²

Although the population is not exclusively Kurdish in much of this area, the dominant culture is Kurdish. Since the early thirteenth century, much of this area has been called Kurdistan, although it was not until the sixteenth century ... that the term Kurdistan came into common usage to denote a system of Kurdish fiefs. Since then, although the term Kurdistan appears on few maps, it is clearly more than a geographical term since it refers also to a human culture which exists on that land. To this extent Kurdistan is a social and political concept.³

I would like to begin with introducing the title of this master’s thesis and then accounting the string of events that has led me to undertake this thesis project to reveal how my initial interest has evolved. I am in belief that the events that have served me to formulate a research question, guiding me to look for answers and to develop further questions are explanatory of the topic. I hope that my findings and

¹ I heard an elderly man telling this to a younger man on the bus for the university personnel in Van.

² White (2000: 14).

³ McDowall (1989: 5).

arguments may transcend political issues studied under its scope and serve for a better life in this region with many disputed names: East of Turkey or Turkey's Kurdistan or North Kurdistan or Southeast Anatolia or Mesopotamia. For sake of clarity and to avoid mishaps of benign interpretations, I shall refer this larger imagined geography as *the Region* which corresponds to depoliticized Turkish versions utilized by the natives: *Yöre* or *Bölge*. The Region is a culturally diverse geography which is populated predominantly by citizens of Turkey with Kurdish origin; as well as other minority groups, religions and sects.

I decided to entitle the work here Kurdish Urban Politics in the Neoliberal Era in order to map out two simultaneous social phenomena. Kurdish Urban Politics –in short – refers to the experience of adaptation to urban localities of the forcibly displaced Kurdish peasants since the 1990s and how this has changed urban politics. This social catastrophe took place when Kurdish identity was severely persecuted; thus the aftermath of displacement and urbanization by no means offered a safe haven from the armed conflict. Authorities did not have a policy to accommodate newcomers to the city, or offer them social or economic support.⁴ Thus, it is Kurdish Urban Politics in the sense that the civic and urban grievances of the displaced peasantry are mobilized by a pro-Kurdish social movement where other mainstream political actors have lost relevance.

The plight of the displaced in the urban localities continued as AKP rose to power in the 2000s. Nearing the end of “state of exception” (*Olağanüstü Hal* or *OHAL* in Turkish) in the region, the social movement, I refer to as *Kurdish Movement*, began running for local offices in 1999 and mobilizing the municipalities to render much needed services. The state's involvement in urban development as

⁴ Turkish government estimates between 3000 and 4000 villages and hamlets were depopulated affecting 350,000 to 380,000 people, while on the other hand, human rights organizations estimate this number to be 1, 5 or 4 million (Jongerden 2005: 235).

non-involvement in the 1990s shifted with the rise of AKP (Justice and Development Party) to power and the neoliberal agenda began resetting frameworks for local governments which further perpetuates uneven geographic development. The second social phenomenon that cuts through Kurdish Urban Politics is thus neoliberalism. The repercussions of substantial changes and reforms Turkey has witnessed especially in the last decade under AKP are to the greatest extent a factor in understanding the continuing conditions which are passed on from the 1990s onwards.

When I first travelled to Diyarbakir in April 2008, I had just been back from Mexico where I had spent six months volunteering and learning about a social movement in Oaxaca that mobilized the whole city with an ideal for a better government. It was my personal interest to understand the motivation and organizing behind social movements that employed novel means and demanded justice. As an undergraduate student of Political Science, I regarded political conflicts in Mexico to be comparable to the political conflicts in Turkey on many levels. I was especially in the belief that the conflict in Mexico that rose due to the maltreatment of indigenous people, state repression and development policies of the government resembled Turkey's longstanding Kurdish conflict. I did not consider the organization of EZLN (the Zapatista Army of National Liberation) in Mexico and PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) in Turkey as armed insurgent groups in the 1980s, their rise in the 1990s and transformation in the 2000s to be coincidental.⁵ Thus, I was drawn to a social movement that raised voices for alternative ways of government and justice through

⁵ Even though I did not pursue an interest to compare these two cases; there are recent academic studies showing that two cases are comparable (Gambetti 2009c, Küçüközer 2010) and actors in both movements are conscious of their similar goals (Casier 2011: 419, Closing Words of the EZLN at the Intercontinental Encounter- 2nd Declaration of La Realidad Retrieved August 1, 2012 from www.struggle.ws/mexico/ezln/1996/ccri_encount_aug.html).

peaceful means in a country where I deemed the social and economic conditions to be similar to mine.

The purpose of my travel to Diyarbakir was to attend to a student conference organized by philosophy students at Dicle University. I had no agenda to substantiate the insights I have carried to Mexico and back. I was not planning to learn more about Kurdish movement or DTP (Democratic Society Party), the official political party within the umbrella of Kurdish Movement then. My purpose was a brief travel to the region to meet other students.

Yet my encounters during this visit began exceeding the purpose. Especially I came to find the talk of Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Osman Baydemir by the local students intriguing. The value and importance attributed to DTP administration under Baydemir and his deeds as the mayor were not just brought in between lines; they were everywhere. Baydemir's administration's accomplishments amounted for the solution of long lasting infrastructure problems of Diyarbakir. Meanwhile tangible services rendered by the municipality marked a discourse of urban identity and sense of belonging for the students whom I met and befriended ever since. Their love of the city did not stem from the romantic idealization of Diyarbakir as "the capital of Kurdistan"; but from witnessing the city to turn into a space that conveniently offered quotidian practices.

The students I have met grew up in different localities close to Diyarbakir but almost none of them were born or raised in the city center. Their life choices, daily practices or leisure activities did not differ from the students from other parts of Turkey. Yet the sense of belonging to the city they portrayed to me as I was getting to know the city astonished me. Their pride in municipal accomplishments was related to services I would take for granted living in Istanbul. Meanwhile as we were

getting to know each other, differences between our experiences started to be laid out. They have witnessed state persecution and repression in their youth, grew affinity towards Kurdish movement and moved to the city to receive a bachelors degree that would help them find a stable occupation.

The first moment that struck me was when we rode a bus to the university because we preferred to take busses of Brother Osman (*Osman Abi'nin otobüsleri*) over private minibuses. Not only the improved public transportation gave delight to them in the urban environment, they also participated in cultural events organized in recreational centers built by the municipality, took promenades around the city walls which were renovated by the initiative of the municipality, spoke well about projects funded by the EU (European Union) to help the municipality undertake social and cultural projects, recited confrontations of Baydemir with state officials where Baydemir's wits triumphed the illogical arguments of the Turkish state and occasionally imitated or mimicked Baydemir's gestures or speeches. Practices introduced by the municipality were cherished with delight. While Baydemir was portrayed as a new leading actor, it also came with the concretization of the presence of Kurdish identity in the city and actualization of the demands of Kurdish movement.

What then was really happening at these municipalities? Was it the charisma of Baydemir that made daily services visible? Why was Baydemir a charismatic local public figure anyways? Or were there no services rendered by the municipality of Diyarbakir to begin with, so anything went? I have always been suspicious of idolization of persons in politics to be explanatory. So I decided to probe into what societal factor and dynamics lead up to mobilization of municipalities inducing civic responsiveness in Diyarbakir for a master's thesis project. The organization of

municipalities by DTP to deliver services meanwhile stamping the city with cultural presence of Kurdish identity was in fact amazing for me. Nonetheless, DTP operated more or less within a more elusive and ramified social movement which on occasions transgresses the defined boundaries of the constitution; especially in terms of demanding minority rights for Kurds. The motivation of these transgressions however is actively asserted to be legitimate.

Two years after my first encounter with the spell of DTP municipalities I moved to Van in June 2010 and became a research assistant at Yüzüncü Yıl University. I was acting on a hunch for a master's thesis project. My determination to pursue investigating local governments had already begun with reviewing the literature on local governments in Turkey and conducting a research on the case of Üsküdar. I regarded my move to Van as an opportunity to formulate a better designed research. My purpose was to live in the Region and to closely experience the public charm of organizing municipalities and gain insights on the history of urban development marked by the forced displacement. Six months before I moved to Van, DTP was dissolved and BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) pursued its legacy. I lived in Van continuously for one and half years until the earthquake in October 2011.

In Van, Kurdish Movement had won the local elections in 1999 but within two years due to internal strife between different cliques that formed the local coalition, the municipality became incapacitated to a large extent for service delivery. In 2004, AKP seized this opportunity and won the municipality against a newly formed coalition of Kurdish movement. But under AKP administration the municipality witnessed embezzlement of public funds that brought the municipality a debt that surmounted 170 million Turkish Liras. The public response to AKP

administration and consolidation of local actors under a single movement allowed DTP to win the local elections with a landslide. Living in Van was a positive aspect because it falls outside the spell of Baydemir's charismatic leadership. Thus I was not enmeshed with idolization of a single person. And also DTP's organizing in Van was still fueling public debate and inducing civic responsiveness. This was due to the setback the movement faced in 2004 elections leading them to lose the local elections to AKP and the election campaign. The party had promised to be accountable and transparent. It was easy to observe the civic responsiveness to municipal services because public debate was created through local media.

In Van I soon became one of the people who contemplated and shared his views on better municipality organizing and developed ideas on how municipalities can become means for the alleviation of the negative effects of the conflict. I started believing more and more that Van was in fact a decent city with grave problems that could be overcome by a hardworking municipality with a long term plan. Of course, this also helped me to come up with my own criticism of the mayor and his administration. I did not abstain from sharing my criticism, nor would my acquaintances have made me feel I should not. This mold of relationship helped me to distance myself from internalization of motivations of Kurdish movement which would have hampered any critical engagement. To be in a position where I can both praise and criticize elevated my conscience as a researcher. I was able to see them for who they really were; people with pride and shame, consistencies and contradictions. My research field literally intervened and forced me to steer the research to be more reflective. By both considering myself in the shoes of the elected local actors and living closely with them, I relived their problems to an extent that broadened my horizon in the relatively short time I spent in the region.

I have conducted my field work, collected data and interviews, observed local actors in their personal spheres while some of my acquaintances became friendships. These friendships flourished both in Diyarbakir and Van. Most importantly I made myself welcome to a vast field where I wanted to address and make sense of my previous encounters. I was immersed in the field and this helped me to gather ethnographic data on why and how the spell worked and to what end this mobilization served. This ethnographic data helped me to formulate a research design and also served to underline many of the points I make in this thesis.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

O brothers, *Romi* soldiers and tyrant *Young Turks* came. Those cruels rained hell from above with airplanes. From the beneath attacked with artillery and gattling guns. Left towns and villages in ruins, O treacherous fate, you killed our men, destroyed our houses, left children orphans; fate is treacherous, not good. Today owls and cuckoos hoot where lions used to roar.¹

There is only identity in Turkey. And it is Turkish Identity. The demand for the recognition of Kurdish cultural identity is a sinister step taken to divide the nation. The state is unitary, the country is unitary, national is unitary. No concessions will be made from these principles. Those who attempt to give up on these ideals are surely blinded, portent and committing treason.²

Centralist nation-state system, alongside disregarding cultural diversity, has resulted in grave instabilities that have left the freedom and equality demands of all societal sections in Turkey unresolved.³

This thesis is based on studying Kurdish politics in the context of Turkey. Kurdish urban politics set out when HEP (People's Labor Party) began organizing as a political party in 1990 to form the basis of a large scale social movement – Kurdish movement – which spread out in Turkey's metropolitan centers and in the Region. Kurdish movement and legal political parties have been organizing since the 1990s

¹ This is from a Kurdish mourning for the massacres at the Mount Ararat during 1926-1930 sung by Şivan Perwer. In Kurdish oral history, Turkish soldiers are referred as Roman (*Romi*). Translation from Kurdish to English belongs to the author.

² From the persecutor's closing lines regarding the dissolution case of HADEP (People's Democracy Party). The Official Gazette, No: 25173. Decision no: 2003/1. Decision Date: 13.03. 2003. Retrieved August 1, 2012 from rega.basbakanlik.gov.tr.

³ Retrieved August 1, 2012, from www.bdp.org.tr/index.php/tr/demokratik-ozerklik-projesi.

to raise consciousness for recognition of Kurds; a decade which the primary focuses had been national politics and general elections.⁴ However after the 1999 local elections, winning local offices and mobilizing municipalities became a field of realization for Kurdish activists to attend to the grievances of their grassroots (Gambetti 2005; 2009a). These grievances had to be addressed while the state underwent neoliberal reforms leaving the least developed Region of Turkey struggling with economic, social and political problems while the armed conflict lingered.

Kurdish movement and its mobilization of local institutions have attracted scholarly attention and numerous studies examined how this realization takes place and its importance. Nicole Watts, Joost Jongerden and Zeynep Gambetti are the leading scholars who study these realizations.⁵ These scholars critically engage with spatial and discursive importance of the organization of Kurdish movement and its counter hegemonic realizations; however there is very little engagement as to which opportunities and what motivating factors and reasons pushed these local activists to mobilize local governments. In this sense, this thesis follows this trend of scholarly endeavor and makes a contribution by studying mobilization of Kurdish activists in depth.

⁴ Especially scholarly work in the 1990s and the early 2000s on Kurdish conflict in Turkey dominantly dwelled more grandeur problems and national events; parallel to the organizing of Kurdish political actors (Bozarslan 2001, Bozarslan 1996, Gunter 2000, Van Bruinessen 1996, Yeğen 1999, White 2000, Entessar 1992, Natali 2005). Among them, White regards this as a failure of “parliamentary Kurdish nationalism” (White 2000: 170-171). The most extensive study regarding the organizing of Kurdish actors in Turkish scene is Nicole Watts’ work entitled *Activists in Office* Kurdish Politics and Protest in Turkey which explains “by working within electoral politics, Kurdish challengers gained access to state-allocated material, legal and political resources that were unavailable to those using armed confrontation” (Watts 2010: 13).

⁵ Watts’ book *Activists in Office* (2010) is the compilation of her work on Kurdish activists. The special issues edited by Watts (2009) and Gambetti and Jongerden (2011), and other articles written by these authors examine the mobilization local institutions by Kurdish movements (Jongerden 2009, Gambetti 2005, Watts 2006).

This thesis explores why urban politics became integral for Kurdish movement and how Kurdish movement mobilizes municipalities by examining the cases of Diyarbakir and Van in the 2000s when the ongoing conflict intersects with neoliberal transformations at the local government level in Turkey. Furthermore, it analyzes the extent to which the motivating factors and reasons for local politics are realized while mobilizing municipalities; given the structural constraints of the conflict and neoliberalism.

To address this question, the life trajectories, experience and mobilization of the local actors and activists within their urban localities and local institutions are investigated through ethnography and in depth interviews. These local actors are municipal councilors from Sur and Yenişehir District Municipalities under the jurisdiction of Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality and Van Provincial Municipality. Through examining local actors, this thesis makes an important contribution to recent scholarly debate by revealing the aspects of urban experience that both motivate and become a source of politically institutionalized collective action. As such, this thesis also discloses how the context of neoliberalism and Kurdish conflict structurally affect this mobilization.

Following the elaboration of the study and the research question, I look into the perspectives through which Kurds in Turkey were examined. The focus of this thesis is thus; understanding the changes in terms of urbanization that Kurdish society in Diyarbakir and Van underwent by illuminating their reasons and means of mobilizing local institutions through electoral politics. As such, the importance of this thesis lies in its novelty to investigate the life trajectories of Kurdish local actors who began contending against traditional power structures and Turkish mainstream

political parties. The fundamental contribution of this thesis is, in a way, to underpin the reasons of a phenomenon whose outcomes have been studied to a large extent.

Kurds and Conflict in Turkey

The conditions that have caused the emergence of the contemporary Kurdish movement and its electoral mobilization are parallel to the conditions that created the preceding Kurdish rebellions. The central aspect that marks the difference of the contemporary organizing from the previous uprisings and the PKK is that in the 1990s, with the formation of HEP, first time in the history of Kurds in Turkey a political party which was organized by dominantly Kurdish actors publicly demanding the recognition of Kurds appeared (Barkey 1998: 130).

The history of modern Turkey is riddled with mass social upheavals. The early republican era witnessed more numerous uprisings and three serious Kurdish rebellions: Sheikh Said (1925), Mount Ararat Rebellions (1926-1930) and Dersim (1938). These rebellions were ended with military operations, leaders were hanged and rural populace was dispersed (White 2000: 73-83). Half a century later, another Kurdish rebellion began with PKK in 1984 that continues up to date. In order to understand contemporary Kurdish politics in Turkey, how PKK and other Kurdish rebellions are studied vis-à-vis Turkish state needs to be examined. This examination should provide a framework of perspectives through which Kurdish reality had been studied and bring forth the points of inquiry into Kurdish society. I aim to utilize these points and perspectives to situate the focus of this thesis; meanwhile suggesting a novel sphere through which to make sense of the topic.

Since the rise of PKK as a Marxist-Leninist organization aimed at national liberation of Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran under a socialist nation-state,⁶ the relatively silent debate on Kurdish reality ramified mainly into discussion of colonization,⁷ democratization and nationalism.⁸ With the end of Cold War and the change in the goals of PKK in the 1990s,⁹ the debate on citizenship with respect to social policy and justice issues, modernization and development with contentious politics and politics of identity were added to the general trend of understanding Kurdish reality in the Middle East;¹⁰ mainly focusing on the case of Turkey while less attention was given to the conditions of Iraq and Iran and very little mention of Syria.¹¹

The general character of Kurdish and Ottoman relations in the nineteenth century and the first half of twentieth century had been realized on the axis of rebellion and cooptation. First the Ottomans and then the Republicans ruled Kurds through attaining patronage networks, sustaining traditional power of local notables in exchange for loyalty and security (Entessar 1992: 87). During the Republican period, this negotiation extended to the public concealment of Kurdish ethnicity. The

⁶ This has been the initial purpose that evolved within the decades; refer to White (2000) for a substantive analysis of the PKK.

⁷ Beşikçi was the first to propose that Kurdistan was a colony of four nation states (Beşikçi 1968; 2004). Ideals stemming parallel from his arguments emanated among Kurdish revolutionaries, especially among DDKO (Eastern Revolutionary Culture Hearths) and Rızgari movements, before PKK was formed (Entessar 1992: 93, Yelezer 2011: 25).

⁸ In the post-coup democratization debate in Turkey much of the discussion revolved around nationalism and citizenship in which authors shared the view that Turkish nationalism and modernization have excluded Kurdish identity and suppressed its culture harshly (Ünsal 1998, Güvenç 1998, Bilgin 1998, Özbudun 1998, Ayata 1998, Keyman and İçduygu 2005, Keyman 2005).

⁹ The collapse of communism surely affected the PKK (White: 2000: VIII). Öcalan reformulated goals in 1998 (White 2000: 184).

¹⁰ Keyman's arguments (2005: 282-283) sums up the scholarly debate Kurdish question as "a governing question" which "in 1980's became a identity/recognition problem because of Kurds exposure to Turkish modernity, it is important to recognize its changing nature claims and goals."

¹¹ Vali (2010), Entessar (1992) and Natali (2005) have written books looking into Kurds in these countries.

mainstream political parties in Turkey after the implementation of multi-party electoral system in the 1950s continued to deal with Kurdish notables to ensure votes and Kurdish notables kept their privileged positions as patrons over large clientele networks (Natali 2005: 86-88, 101).

When the deal between the actors in the centre and periphery came into a crisis, as in the case of Kurds; the actors in the periphery resorted to rebellions. However the sporadic and uncoordinated rebellions of Kurds did not succeed in achieving particular goals of the rebels nor autonomy or recognition on the part of Kurds.¹² These rebellions have been particularly examined to assess the motivation of the rebels and the limit of the crises. The sporadic and uncoordinated nature of the uprisings indicated that the governing methods of Turkish elite were generally working in containing larger scale of Kurdish masses. The uprisings indicated that certain notables felt that their particular interests were breached. Turkish elites were able to militarize and support certain notables to ensure their loyalty in suppressing these rebellions; thus reshuffling local power dynamics for their interest (Natali 2005: 79).

In this sense, the central inquiry has been to underpin whether the particular rebellions have been motivated by nationalist, thus modernist inclinations or by self-preservation, thus traditionalist or primitive. The former would suggest that the whole governing body in the Region had been in crises and Kurdish actors had been mobilizing their societies to achieve self determination. But there are competing arguments over the motivation of Kurdish uprisings before PKK.¹³ However as for

¹² Due their uncoordinated nature, White (2000: 84) asserts that these rebellions are not nationalist in the modern sense.

¹³ Entessar (1992), Bozarslan (2005) and Natali (2005) argue that certain rebellions (Sheikh Said and Ararat rebellions) have shown nationalist tendencies. Van Bruinessen (2003: 393) adds another

explaining PKK, there is a relatively strong consensus within the scholarly literature that the latest Kurdish rebellion is indeed a modernizing force for Kurdish society in Turkey.¹⁴ This also indicates that Turkish mode of governing the Region is indeed fallen into crises and failed to sustain its networks of legitimacy. I aim to show through this thesis how this crisis manifested itself in urban politics.

By examining PKK, many scholars have attempted to understand Kurdish society in Turkey with respect to Turkish modernization, state and citizenship issues and how these affected the rise of Kurdish nationalism (or ethno nationalism). The converging points of these studies are that, first, Kurdish rebellion is a nationalist phenomenon that should be regarded as the pursuit of statehood by one of the largest ethnic groups without a nation-state (Özoğlu 2004: 1), second the contemporary conflict has risen through exposure of Kurds in Turkey to Turkish nationalism and modernity thus signaling the failure of Turkish modernization efforts¹⁵ (Ergil 2000: 125), third, with the end of Cold War, Kurdish insurgency joined the global trend of politics of identity (Ayata 1998), and fourth, the handling of Kurdish issue by the Turkish authorities became the central axis of human rights violations in Turkey which impedes Turkey's accession to the European Union (Bozarslan 2001).

This thesis focuses on the second and third points to explain them through other spheres which I deem to be less explored, while I problematize the first point

compelling argument to the discussion and underlines Armenian massacres until 1915 allowed Kurds to contemplate a separate nation state.

¹⁴ White defines the PKK uprising as a modernizing movement (2000).

¹⁵ Ergil writes that "the Kurds, cut off from the rest of the country by their remote location in the mountainous southeastern regions, divided along tribal lines, and economically dependent on local landed elites, remained largely unaffected by the new regime's policies of assimilation and modernization (2000: 125)." But geography and local politics alone is not sufficient to understand why both modernization and development failed in case of Kurds. As Jongerden and Gambetti write "with respect to the Kurdish issue in Turkey, modernization (development) was considered to be a process of inevitable social transformation, of the backward into the modern, of the tribal into the state, of Kurds into Turks (2011: 376)." Since Kurds never became "Turks" (Yeğen 1999; 2006), their modernization experience induced by the central state never translated into "development."

on Kurdish nationalism. Instead of looking into bigger events – such as PKK or parliamentary politics of Kurdish movement – I purport to look into local politics in the Region and explore other spheres. These spheres are the increased importance of urban politics for Kurdish actors and mobilization of local bodies and institutions to address the grievances of failed modernization and development in the Region and incorporation of cultural and identity claims with economic and urban justice demands. The objective is to understand why local politics became central for Kurdish actors and how local institutions are mobilized in accord with these motives.

Kurdish Actors in Electoral and Local Politics

In parallel with the research focus, I look into the changes in the political context to reveal how new venues for political gains opened up with participation in local politics and how this has allowed the movement to re-enter national political scene in 2007. Especially, the experience of local politics has further contributed to the functioning of the movement and became a base of contemplation for the movement's project for solving the conflict: Democratic Autonomy. This project offers to solve the conflict through strengthening local institutions and participation and asserts to autonomously begin implement the means to achieve this end. The fact that the fundamental solution to resolving the conflict is based on local politics makes the study of why and how local politics became important for local actors of the movement compelling.

In order to underpin the importance of studying local politics in the Region, I need to trace the context through which mobilizing municipalities for political gains became central for Kurdish movement. The election results, dissolution of the parties

and statements of party members bear substantial evidence to make sense of this context. As such, the rise of Kurdish actors in electoral politics and their proposals for solving the conflict can be situated.

I have delineated that the rise of PKK signaled a crisis in the governing of the Region by the Turkish elite. In parallel, mainstream political parties of Turkish political scene also began losing electoral bases while local notables' power over their clientele networks diminished due to various political, social and economic changes induced by urbanization and the continuing conflict (White 2000: 103, Entessar 1991: 91, Natali 2005: 88). These changes are fundamentally related to the context through which local and Kurdish actors who voiced the grievances of Kurdish identity became a major contender (and with time the hegemonic force) in local politics.

In 1989, parliamentarians of SHP (Social Democratic Populist Party) from the Region attended a conference on Kurds in Paris (Zubaida 1990). This created disturbances among the majority of the party, and despite his promise to support the parliamentarians attending the conference, the leader of the party İnönü also backed down. Ten parliamentarians from the Region resigned from SHP and formed HEP, beginning the journey of Kurdish movement in electoral politics. Just like Kemalist reflexes of Turkish Left became a pretense for independent organization for the liberation of Kurdistan in the 1970s (Watts 2010: 60-65), the nationalist reflexes of social democrats in SHP became a reason for independent political party for Kurdish actors in the 1990s (Watts 2010: 64).

HEP was dissolved by the constitutional court in 1991. Parliamentarians formed DEP (Democratic Party) which formed a coalition with SHP in 1991 general elections. The party was dissolved in 1994 after the immunity of the parliamentarians

had been evoked. They were subsequently imprisoned. The events that triggered the dissolution of the party and the imprisonment of the MPs had been initiated with the insistence of taking the parliamentary oath in Kurdish. Following these events, the party decided to boycott the local elections. The decision rested on the incremental increase of repression before the elections. Fearing more assassinations and disappearances the movement decided not to continue with the campaign (Watts 2010: 109). RP (Welfare Party) was able to sweep and win the significant majority of municipalities in the Region and the story of local offices for the movement actually begins with the boycott of local elections in 1994. The events in the next five years show how the participation to the 1999 local elections has developed.

HADEP (People's Democracy Party) was formed in 1995 in an era when the movement decided not to call PKK as a terrorist organization and recognize Öcalan as the leader of Kurdish people (Toplum ve Kuram Dergisi 2010: 134). Even though the strong influence of Öcalan over the masses that vote for the party are acknowledged by all segments of Kurdish movement, there is not an organic relationship between the political parties affiliated with the movement and the PKK (Barkey 1998: 131) but the dissolution cases condemn the parties for being "the locus of illegal activity" (Koğacıoğlu 2003; 2004). In comparison to the 1994 local elections, HADEP's participation in the 1995 general elections received more attention since actually the movement mobilized and participated despite the arrests of the previous year (Bozarslan 1996; Barkey 1998). This also indicates that both the priorities of the movement and attention towards the movement still revolved around the importance of general elections over local elections. HADEP garnered 4.16 % of the national votes.¹⁶ This percentage did not allow the entry to the parliament as the

¹⁶ Results retrieved August 1, 2012 from www.tuik.gov.tr.

threshold is 10 percent. The threshold was implemented after the 1980 coup and has been instrumental to keep Kurdish representation or other elements deemed radical away from the parliament (Watts 2010: 60).

The second election experience under HADEP came in 1999. The local elections and general elections took place on the same date in 1999: April 18. The general election results proved to be slightly better than the previous elections: 4.75 %. The local elections results based on votes of Special Administration Councilors¹⁷ was however less: 3.48 %. But the party had won the seats of thirty seven municipalities.

1999 was a significant turning point for Kurdish movement and the guerrilla warfare because in February PKK's leader Abdullah Öcalan was captured by Turkish Security Forces in Kenya. The unilateral ceasefire of PKK that began shortly before Öcalan's capture lasted until 2004. The military tactics of the movement began declining and Öcalan ordered the guerrilla forces to retreat beyond Iraqi border. Öcalan's declarations after his capture which were deemed submissive and implied defeat created dissidence among PKK lines and its urban and youth organizations; eventually these events did not bring the end of the armed conflict (Tezcür 2009).

In the 2000s more activists in the movement preferred to participate in electoral and party politics in the Region. The channels that were clogged for national politics have been opening up for local politics. The 1999 local elections came before these changes became rooted and widespread. According to an article published in *Aksiyon*, a monthly journal, the local elections in 1999 was fixed to

¹⁷ Special Administration Council (*İl Özel İdaresi*) is elected locally, functions under the governorship to deliver services to mainly rural areas. Its results indicate both urban and rural constituency.

HADEP's position.¹⁸ The same article cited HADEP's vice president Bahattin Günel's statements on HADEP's strategic positioning preceding the elections and the capture of Öcalan:

Election laws, threshold, date of election will all be determined partially against HADEP's favor. The system has a chance to block us in general elections with threshold but it doesn't have that chance in local elections. Because we are still a *challenge* (sorun) for the system. We know that the state's opinion of us has not changed. A lawsuit for dissolution of a party cannot be filed after making a decision to participate in elections. They cannot dissolve us after that stage. We will determine the results of the election. That's why even though we seem to be a *challenge* for the system we can also be a part of the solution (emphasis added, author's translation).

The period between 1994 and 1999 witnessed the decrease in extra juridical violence especially after Öcalan's capture. Throughout the 1990s, the movement continued to enter all elections except in 1994. The movement participated in general elections without collaborating with other political parties and did not win any seats because of the ten percent threshold. Even though the threshold did not allow the movement to win any seats, the election results allowed them to see that locally they could win offices. The statement above is drawing attention to this reality. As long as the party remains intact, and it could because once declared to participate in elections it cannot be dissolved, local elections would allow the party to win local public offices.

Thus, prior to the 1999 local elections, the predominant reason for participating in local elections was articulated in terms of because "they could." This may seem to be an eccentric statement considering that the political party is a legal foundation operating under the Turkish electoral system. Given the context of repression, even the opening up of venues of actual participation became central; making the reason for participation and attributing importance to the local elections: possibility and opportunity. Strategically, the fact that participating in local offices

¹⁸ Yavuz, E. (1998, September 26). Seçimler HADEP'e Endeksli [Elections are fixated to HADEP]. Aksiyon. Retrieved June 25, 2012 from www.aksiyon.com.tr/aksiyon/haber-4163-33-secimler-hadepe-endeksli.html.

produced electoral wins in the face of the national threshold, made local politics better accessible for the movement. In this thesis, I show that there are other factors that made local politics central for the movement beyond the initial kick start of accessibility. These factors have emerged and developed during the conflict and as a result of ensuing neoliberalism in the last two decades.

After participating in the 1995 general elections and 1999 general and local elections and winning thirty six municipalities, HADEP was dissolved in 2003. The members joined DEHAP (Democratic People's Party) which participated in the 2004 local elections through a coalition with SHP, but in 2005 DEHAP was dissolved and DTP founded. DTP's formation was an important move to form links between the municipalities, expand and organize the electoral base and form intraregional networks. As a metropolitan municipality with four district municipalities under its jurisdiction, Diyarbakir became the face of Kurdish Urban Politics nationally and internationally (Casier 2011). As the state of exception ended in 2002 in the Region, Diyarbakir turned into an expanding arena for the construction business (Yüksel 2011). The unilateral ceasefire of PKK that lasted for five years until 2004 and Öcalan's inculcations from the Isle of Imrali where he is imprisoned for life curbed contentious politics and allowed the urban sprout in Diyarbakir. Another important turning point in 2004 elections was the election of Baydemir. His predecessor Feridun Çelik who is a lawyer and has been an active member of the political tradition was not nominated. In comparison Baydemir is also a lawyer but instead of participating in the political arena, Baydemir made his reputation through his Human Rights activism at İHD Diyarbakir branch. Even though Çelik declared that he would run as an independent candidate, he later backed down and Baydemir won the office of mayor with a landslide.

Baydemir's nomination and election strengthened the influence of İHD (Human's Rights Association) in the Region and the association literally became a springboard for winning an office or become a parliamentarian (Watts 2010: 71). The source of this influence is inextricably linked with the position lawyers assumed to defend people affected from the conflict. What made Baydemir and other İHD activists popular public figures was that he took cases (mostly for free) of human rights violations, applied to European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on behalf of the victims and offered legal guidance on how to receive compensation.¹⁹ Considering the large numbers of people affected by the conflict, Diyarbakir İHD branch became a locus of public attention and its popularity elevated the activists among the masses.

The increasing success of DTP in local elections and the political climate encouraged the party to attempt to beat the odds and enter the national assembly once again. In 2007, a coalition was formed under the name of Candidates for Thousand Hopes (*Bin Umut Adayları*). DTP garnered the support of the Left politics in Turkey's western metropolitan centers and twenty two candidates who ran as independents were elected MPs. Upon their election, the parliamentarians formed DTP and Kurdish representation through the perspective of the movement came forward after thirteen years. This no doubt strengthened DTP locally and bore significant importance for the upcoming local elections in 2009.

Realizing the importance of public figures from local NGO activities, developing local organizational capacity in other localities in the Region and decreasing levels of conflict and political pressure allowed DTP to mobilize municipalities successfully to appease its voters. The movement was able to reap the

¹⁹ İHD activists became the first target of the state's extra juridical killings due to their work in the Region and many activists were assassinated, disappeared or exiled (Watts 2010: 96).

fruits of this mobilization and the regional increase in organizational capacity by winning ninety nine municipalities in 2009. While keeping its previous municipalities, Siirt, Van and Iğdır provincial municipalities were won. Again most of the municipalities were town and district municipalities from Mardin, Muş, Kars, Şanlıurfa and Bitlis provinces. They also won the district municipality of Akdeniz which is one of the central districts of Mersin. Almost all of the incumbent administrations belonged to AKP.

The year following the local elections DTP began feeling more pressure from the state. The court case of KCK (Union of Communities in Kurdistan) began in April 2009 with the arrest of mayors, councilors and party members affiliated with DTP. The allegations are based on membership to KCK, as the urban apparatus of PKK. Since its initiation, thousands of people were detained, imprisoned and charged with membership to KCK. Among the detainees apart from Kurdish activists and BDP officials there are also academics, teachers, union organizers, journalists, students, community elders and opinion leaders.²⁰ Following the same year in December, DTP was dissolved by the constitutional court. The members immediately joined BDP, which was formed a year prior to the dissolution of DTP.

The rise of Kurdish actors in electoral politics and their experience with local politics makes the following questions important to study. How is BDP mobilizing ninety nine municipalities despite the persecution, conflict and war? What are resources and capabilities amassed by the movement that exponentially increased the number of municipalities won in the last two local elections? Do they have a sound

²⁰ The criminalization of people outside the movement is in line with general political motivation against opposition that has developed in the last decade. Gambetti's article has compelling analysis on the issue of neoliberalism, violence and institutional politics where she argues that lynching in Turkey has equated dissident elements to being a separatist Kurd (2009b: 157). In this sense, people outside the movement who are being detained as members of KCK can be better understood. Anyone's dissidence of government's policies and support for the cause of the movement is criminalized.

proposal for solution of the Kurdish conflict and the functioning of local governments? If they do, to what extent their solution proposals are motivated by their experience with local politics?

In the face of repression of any sorts, as it is explained in following chapters, the local actors of BDP always underline their resilience and state that they shall not forget the sacrifices made by the movement to achieve what they have achieved so far. Most importantly, there is always the argument that the success of BDP's municipal services and accountability would never be matched by AKP in the Region. They not only see their functioning to be better than their challengers, but also articulate that their proposal is more sound and encompassing than other political traditions. In this sense, the project of Democratic Autonomy must come under scrutiny for understanding how this experience relates to their national politics.

Democratic Autonomy is a project put forward by BDP in 2009 to solve the conflict. The project entails decentralization, administrative subsidiarity and increased resource allocation to less developed regions.²¹ It has three main political aspects in its core. First, it is based on the critique of Turkish state formation and modernization, second, it is a proposal for constitutional changes and third, it is a declaration that BDP will autonomously continue organizing local bodies to achieve the ends in the proposal. This makes local politics both the ultimate means and ends to ensure the decentralization and administrative subsidiarity and implementation of politics recognizing cultural diversity and its protection. Thus examining the municipalities presided by BDP makes compelling cases to understand why and how local politics became important for Kurdish movement.

²¹ Demokratik Özerklik Projesi [The Project of Democratic Autonomy]. Retrieved August 1, 2012 from www.bdp.org.tr/index.php/tr/demokratik-ozerklik-projesi.

Local politics and elections for Kurdish movement allowed the election of parliamentarians despite the election's threshold. In the early 1990s, the coalition with SHP allowed for the election of Kurdish deputies however the conditions have irreversibly changed by 1995 and election coalitions were no longer possible. The parties of the Kurdish movement continued to run for elections but to no avail because the 10 percent threshold prevented them from getting MPs elected. However the 1999 and especially the 2004 local election results have supplied them with unprecedented data on the location and quantity of their electorate. Especially the results of Special Provincial Administration Councils revealed these numbers for each neighborhood and village. Using these statistics, the movement was able to determine the number of votes required to get an independent candidate elected as an MP without having to get 10 percent of the national votes. In provinces where the electoral base would have allowed more than one independent candidate to be elected, Kurdish movement revealed tremendous organizational capacity. By dividing provinces in accord with vote potential and organizing the electorate to vote for the candidate representing their election zone, in the 2007 general elections the movement was able to get four candidates in Diyarbakir and two candidates in Van elected as MPs. In the 2012 elections this number increased to six and four respectively; meanwhile in the provinces such as Hakkari, Mardin, Muş, Şırnak and Urfa multiple candidates were elected. All these electoral successes were due to the meticulous organization and knowledge produced due to mobilization at the local level in the last decade.

Kurdish Movement as a Popular Urban Social Movement

Kurdish movement has rarely been examined by social movements' scholars as a case study;²² partly due to the fact that Kurdish movement is studied under Kurdish conflict and Turkish politics. Yet one of the pillars of this thesis is that Kurdish movement is a social movement. That is why, I need to further support this claim and look into two different literatures on social movements. The first literature is Marxist perspectives on the urbanization and capitalism; spearheaded by Manuel Castells in the 1970s. The second literature is social movements literature of comparative politics. I resort to the first literature to sketch an outline of Kurdish movement and to the second literature to raise questions in depth.

The demands of Kurdish movement since the 1990s including the project of Democratic Autonomy are cultural recognition of diversity, administrative subsidiarity, just distribution of national wealth and end of armed conflict. Most of its activists organized outside elected offices and as a social movement; eventually receiving representation. The working of the party is relatively democratic with practices such as women's quota and co-chairing presidency of the party as decreed by the party program.²³ As such, it is cogent to conceptualize the working of the party parallel to the concepts below that describe the working of political parties arising from social movements:

...in terms of a series of related circles of growing size: the smallest comprises the leadership core, together with its advisers; next come parliamentary representatives; then active members, people who spend a lot of their time working actively for the party, but want to have a symbolic attachment to it, help with the occasional activity, and pay a regular membership subscription: then supporters, or loyal voters, who do virtually nothing for the party except reliably turn out for it on election days; finally,

²² A notable exception is Gambetti's (2009c) comparison of Zapatista and Kurdish movements.

²³ BDP's party program is available online. Retrieved August 1, 2012 from www.bdp.org.tr.

the largest circle of all, the wider target electorate, which the party seeks to persuade to vote for it. ... The leaders are drawn from the activists, who are drawn from the party membership, which is part of and therefore reflects the concerns and interests of those parts of the electorate which the party most seeks to represent. A major function of the intermediate circles is to link political leaders to the electorate in a two-way interaction via the various levels of the party (Crouch 2004: 70).

This thesis explores how these activists mobilize and organize municipalities being aware that the social movement is contemporary to an armed conflict. The armed groups target masses for liberation; one side of which the social movement aims to garner their electoral support. For the armed forces, these masses are Kurdish people however for the social movement the issue is more intricate. This calls for exploring the nature and composition of the social movement in terms of objective class positions and spatial inter-connectedness and how this composition came to be historically. And Castells definition of urban social movements offers a good start:

Urban social movements, i.e. movements which around protest concerning the urban and ecology, organize and mobilize populations, transform relations of force between classes, innovate cultural models, and become one of the essential axes for social change. ... Community movements of struggle and participation ... all these are witnesses to their appearance of new forms of popular protest and organization arising from the contradictions of daily existence in capitalist cities (Castells 1978: 2).

Initially, the guerrilla forces organized in rural communities but the social movement in the urban localities. This is largely due to the fact that rural communities have been depopulated forcibly and their more imminent grievances developed in the urban localities. This resulted in the spatial inter-connectedness of masses with parallel grievances in cities. This gave the social movement an urban character which is absorbs a “popular strata”, “a new petit bourgeoisie fraction of technicians and clerks, as well as nonworking women, elements traditionally distant from the working-class movement” (Merrifield 2002: 123). As an urban social movement, Kurdish movement is also a popular struggle (*halk hareketi*) because of the objective

class positions of masses coupled with ethnic identity. This has allowed the social movement to ramify into NGOs and civil society organizations through which the demands of the movement find resonance and recognition. The variance of objective class positions in the movement and its local actors should be thought in relation to the popular and urban traits of the social movement.

Kurdish Question exceeds the borders of Turkey and is a central problem for Iran, Iraq and Syria as well as international politics in Middle East. In each case Kurds became a concern of nationalists after the formation of nation states. In parallel, Kurdish Conflict in Turkey is a problem set out after the formation of Turkish Republic and its unitary nation state (Natali 2005: 180-181). And lastly, despite the variance of social movements organized by Kurds in Turkey, (Natali 2005, Entessar 1992, White 2000, Yeleser 2011, Gündoğan 2011) I refer to a single Kurdish movement throughout this thesis. I would like to discuss how the movement with regard to its urban and popular composition and how state-society in the Region have been studied by scholars to allow for a brief base for my findings and arguments. Bozarslan sums up all aspects of Kurdish Question studied by social scientists:

What terms can be used to discuss the Kurdish problem since it is both an integral element of the minority problem within the Middle East and an internal problem for Turkey itself? Is it appropriate to select a historical viewpoint and emphasize the significance of the particularly bloody revolts that shook the Kemalist republic? *Or might it not be preferable to refer to economic and demographic factors in order to describe the ways in which the agricultural economy was thrown into crises and Kurdish towns became vast human conglomerations which only had an insignificant role within the overall national industrial production pattern?* Or again, should the socio-political aspect of the issue be highlighted, so that the significance of religious brotherhoods, tribes and *new urban social strata within the political life of Kurdish regions and of Turkey itself can be emphasized?* Finally, would it not be most convenient to concentrate on geopolitical considerations as the Kurdish problem extends far further than the confines of Turkey and is a key factor in its foreign policy? (Bozarslan 1992: 95, emphasis added)

As my emphasis shows, I would like to look into two aspects of the conflict: the relation of Kurdish cities to overall national industrial production pattern and the rise of new urban social strata in these cities. The first aspect with respect to the scope of this thesis is neoliberalism and the municipal reform of Turkey which encompasses a series of legal amendments in 2006. In terms of understanding the new social strata within the political life of Kurdish cities, research on the changes the Region has witnessed in the last decade in terms of state-society relations proves to be resourceful.

PKK reformulated its position, gave up the ideal of a separate Kurdish state and regrouped between 1999 and 2004 (Tezcür 2009). This inevitably led to end of binary confrontations between state and society and allowed for a constellation of new actors in the Region. Meanwhile the actual state of exception ended in 2002 which seemed to have become a permanent modus of living. Watts asserts that these changes “emphasize historical specificity” and calls for “an open recognition of the variability of authority, accommodation, and protest through time and across space” for scholarly research (Watts 2009: 2). In the peak of the conflict, the dense barrier between state and society seemed to be impenetrable (Watts 2009: 9). But as the local activists won local offices, their “access to the tools and resources of governmentality and government practices has facilitated a number of activities that bring contentious social practices and norms into formal realms of representative government, bridging the state-society relationship in new ways” (Watts 2009: 10).

Local offices in this sense gave local activists the access to appease their previous grievances. I suggest that these grievances have three main topics which could be appeased through using local governments: civic, urban and identity. Civic issues are related to citizens’ access to resources of municipal services; cultural,

educational and recreational. Urban issues are related to citizens' demands of infrastructure and superstructure. Civic issues are based on public participation and willingness; whereas urban issues are technical requirements for basic services. Both these issues have been the result of rapid urbanization caused by the arrival of the displaced. However identity issues are fundamentally different yet related to urban and civic issues. The problems caused by rapid urbanization went along with the persecution of Kurdish identity. Thus, its recognition and prevalence also became a central political concern. In terms of delivering urban services and multiplying venues of access for citizens, the local actors of BDP also insisted (and resisted) to reproduce the new urban space representing the presence of Kurds (and other cultures and ethnic groups in the Region) in their localities (Jongerden 2009).

In order to further underpin the power through which the new urban popular strata bestow upon Kurdish movement, I propose to look into the social movement literature of comparative politics. Tarrow conceptualizes the opportunities that create power structures which avail social movements to become challengers:

Power in movement grows when ordinary people join forces in contentious confrontation with elites, authorities and opponents. Mounting, coordinating and sustaining this interaction is the peculiar contribution of the social movements. Movements are created when political opportunities open up for social actors who usually lack them. They draw people into collective action through known repertoires of contention and by creating innovations around their margins. At their base are the social networks and cultural symbols through which social relations are organized. The denser the former and the more familiar the latter, the more likely movements are to spread and be sustained. ... Triggered by the incentives created by political opportunities, combining conventional and challenging forms of action and building on social networks and cultural frames is how movements overcome the obstacles to collective action and sustain their interactions with opponents and with the state (Tarrow 1994: 1).

Previously, I have delineated how political opportunities opened up with the 1999 local elections for Kurdish actors. This has allowed the movement to consolidate its urban roots and became a call for collective action. In the framework Tarrow

proposes, culture appears as another parameter which needs to be double defined. Cultural symbols are regarded to be at the base of organizing social relations. In this sense, culture already exists within a social movement. But Kurdish movement makes specific demands based on cultural recognition: thus there is a grievance based on misrecognition of Kurdish culture.

So what is the culture in Kurdish movement: the given or demanded? Since cultural frames and social networks are used to sustain collective action, I propose that Kurdish movement takes the emerging urban Kurdish culture among the new urban strata as a mobilizer and demands its autonomy from mainstream entanglements. This renders Kurdish movement a transformative and reformative social movement simultaneously (Cohen and Rai 2000: 2). It seeks to reform culture within its ranks and transform the recognition of culture in the larger context. This dynamic perhaps allows for resilience among ranks because it seeks to both destruct and create.

But which class lines among the urban strata spearheads the centrality of cultural demands throughout the mobilization and which ones are receptors? The answer to this question is, in this case is that all of them: since the main reason for the conflict had been Kurdishness. However still, activists from certain class alignments have more central roles: and these are educated middle class Kurdish activists (Watts 2010). In this sense, the arguments of Della Porta and Diani are relevant to substantiate how Kurdish movement can go beyond mere cultural recognition demands while mobilizing municipalities:

The new middle class is constituted from sectors of population that tend to be employed in the service sector: they are highly educated, yet are not comparable with managers or traditional professionals. As a result of their technical and cultural competence and of their economic-functional position, members of the new middle class are more likely to mobilize in conflicts of the new type we have just describe; that is, to fight against technocrats, public

and private agencies engaged in the dissemination of information and in the construction of consensus, the military and the apparatus responsible for social control (Della Porta and Diani 2006: 55).

Thus, Kurdish movement has garnered two fundamental resources to utilize alongside its popular urban composition: culture as means and an end and actors as challengers. In this thesis, I show how both are relevant to understand why and how local offices are mobilized by Kurdish movement. The social movements literature and research should further assist the analysis made in this thesis in the following chapters.

Urbanization, Neoliberalism and Municipal Reform in Turkey

Municipalities have been founded in Turkey before the republic in nineteenth century (Tekeli 1982:70). In the 1930s, the state began to redistribute resources to municipalities through İller Bankası (Keleş 1982:119). The mayors became elected through local election after the 1960s (Keleş 1982:120). The latest legal amendments (laws, rules and regulations) on the municipalities have been ratified in 2005. These changes have been accepted and studied as a reform of local governments and municipalities (Özgür and Kösecik 2007).

Rapid urbanization in Turkey in the 1960s rendered municipalities important institutions for local service delivery (Danielson and Keleş 1985: 219-220). Especially in western provinces where state investment through the import substitution industrialization policies created job opportunities, urban services became a central political concern. Resenting the limited amount of financial resources distributed by the central government (İncioğlu 2002:76), mayors began

raising their voices for more democratic and autonomous municipalities (Göymen 1982:139).

The demand for increase in financial resources continued throughout the 1990s (Görmez 1997) but the idea of democratic and autonomous municipalities disappeared. There are two main factors to explain why this has occurred. Firstly, central governments increased state investment to industrialized urban localities and began solving ingrained urban problems. Secondly, local autonomy has become a political red line with the rise of Kurdish conflict. This is apparent in the solutions presented by mainstream political parties to improve the functioning of local governments and the clauses of European Charter of Local Self-Government which Turkey has chosen place reservations (TUSİAD 1995). The idea of local autonomy is rejected by political parties on the basis that it may disrupt national unity. The clauses on increased autonomy for local actors to determine planning and distribution of resources and legally established limits of centralist interventions on elected actors have not been ratified. Central actors in Turkey had been concerned for Kurdish actors to rise to local offices before they actually did it in 1999.

The rapid urbanization and the political changes brought with it in the western metropolitan centers are fundamentally different from that cities in the Region faced after the conflict. Danielson and Keleş regard the urbanization to be a success and a failure because while it created jobs, raised income, level of health and education; city services lacked the desired conditions. Politically, “highly competitive parties provided the means of response to the pragmatic desires of urban newcomers for housing, job, and public services”, meanwhile “urban newcomers have used the ballot pragmatically to advance their interests” raising “citizen involvement, responsive government and social justice” in the 1970s (Danielson and

Keleş 1985: 217-220). Economically, “Istanbul, Ankara and other metropolitan centers were able to capture the lion’s share of public investments for services, economic development, public facilities, housing construction and gecekondu [squatter] improvements” (Danielson and Keleş 1985: 221). Based on all these changes Danielson and Keleş argued that more autonomous local bodies with more resources were needed in order to control land building by complying with urban plans (1985: 232).

In order to understand the Municipal Reform in Turkey, global changes and debate on local governments must be also examined. The scholarly interest of local administration by advocates of neoliberalism started in the 1990s. Issues such as privatization, contracting out, accountability, decentralization and subsidiarity became their central concern (Prager 1994, Prager 2008, Hansen 2003, Warner 2008, Warner and Hefetz 2008, Ward 1992, Brooks 2004). In the last decades their research agenda shifted from empirically grounding the success of the neoliberal formula for local governments towards seeking examples of how all private, all public or private-public partnership allow sustainable cuts in costs of service delivery. The maxim of the literature has been Tiebout’s (1956) characterization of local governments as firms and citizens as consumers. Crouch (2004: 49) articulates that indeed consumers triumphed over citizens.

In this sense, the overwhelming concern for local governments became effective use of labor. Despite changing arguments and variety of empirical cases, the common solution did not change: Regulation of contracts, pension rates and other social security by avoiding full time employment of municipal personnel through privatization and/or contracting out services. I believe the critiques of neoliberalism

offer better analytical and conceptual tools to understand the social, political and economic changes since the 1970s:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices which proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (Harvey 2006: 145).

Prevalence of neoliberal ideology and its application in political, social and economic spheres of society brought critical engagement of the issue by scholars worldwide. The work of David Harvey pioneered this engagement and his work on the emanation of neoliberalism (Harvey 2005) has been quite influential. Timothy Mitchell (2002) examined how post colonial states have employed neoliberal reforms through rule of expertise and technocracy. Critical geographers and social scientists set out a new research agenda to better evaluate how neoliberal ideology is spatially produced in urban localities (Brenner and Theodore 2002, Peck and Tickell 2002, Jessop 2002). Neoliberalism is defined as a globally prevailing phenomenon which is marked by “corporatization, commodification and privatization of hitherto public assets”, deregulation “of redistributive activity through speculation, predation, fraud and thievery”, crises creation and management, the neoliberal state became “set of institutions, becomes a prime agent of redistributive policies, reversing the flow from the upper to the lower classes that had occurred during the era of social democratic hegemony” (Harvey 2006: 153-155). Wacquant observes the social changes induced by neoliberal ideology in Western urban centers as follows:

Whereas in the Fordist age poverty in the Western metropolis used to be mainly residual or cyclical, embedded in working-class communities, geographically diffuse and considered remediable by means of the continued expansion of the commodity form, it now appears to be increasingly persistent if not permanent, disconnected from macroeconomic fluctuations, and fixated upon neighborhoods of relegation enshrouded in a sulfurous aura, within which social isolation and alienation feed upon each other as the

chasm between those consigned there and the broader society deepens (Wacquant 2008: 261).

I think that these critiques of neoliberalism and analysis of neoliberal policies are also relevant to understand the ideology behind Turkey's municipal reform and policies of urban development. The municipal reform specifically defined the extent, quantity and quality of personnel municipalities can employ depending on the site, tenure and development of urban zone which determined by central actors.²⁴ In parallel, expending more than thirty percent of budget for personnel salaries is countered with economic sanctions. Municipalities had begun privatizing and contracting out services in the 1990s however following these centralist interventions to render local labor market more flexible, all municipalities were conveyed to buy services instead of making them (Kadirbeyoğlu and Sümer *forthcoming* 2012).

In terms of resource allocation, there are two issues that redefine the redistributive role of the state. The resources allocated to each municipality came to be determined by the amount of taxes collected in each urban locality while population became less significant.²⁵ Meanwhile the municipalities were given direct access to collect more taxes which is considered to be devolution of duties. The purpose is to force municipalities to collect taxes allocated to their budget more efficiently. However both instances cannot mitigate the historical regional discrepancies that are the result of uneven geographical development (Harvey 2006). Especially in the Region, where informal economical transactions are ingrained, level of income is lower and taxes (such as property or construction) have not been

²⁴ Belediye ve Bağlı Kuruluşları ile Mahalli İdare Birlikleri Norm Kadro İlke ve Standartlarına dair Yönetmelik [Regulation on Norm Cadres Principles and Standards for Local Governments], Official Gazette No: 26442, Date: February 22, 2007. Retrieved June 25, 2012 from www.mevzuat.gov.tr/Metin.Aspx?MevzuatKod=7.5.11125&sourceXmlSearch=&MevzuatIliski=0.

²⁵ İl Özel İdarelerine ve Belediyelere Genel Bütçe Vergi Gelirlerinden Pay Verilmesi Hakkında 5779 Sayılı Kanun [Law numerated 5579 on Distributing the General Budget Tax Revenues to Local Governments], Official Gazette No: 26937, Date: July 15, 2008. Retrieved June 25, 2012 from www.mevzuat.adalet.gov.tr/html/27913.html.

collected for a long time; these changes proved to be aggravating the economic condition of municipalities. The fixation of most of industrial and commercial income to their specific localities undermines to take into regard of historical relations of interdependence in Turkey. The sites where end products are produced, formalized and booked continue enjoying the returns of the redistributive function of the state; whereas less developed urban sites and rural communities who have been providing both goods and labor to these production sites get to enjoy less. Both of these underline that the arguments of Harvey and Wacquant are relevant to the case of Turkey, especially in urban localities and the less developed Kurdish region.

The leading indicator of prevalence of neoliberal ideas of development and political participation is the presence of local business people and contractors in local offices, such as the case of Turkey (Kadirbeyoğlu and Sümer *forthcoming*). Crouch argues that this had led to a new period of politics and coins the term Post-Democracy to underpin “the vacuum left in mass political participation by the decline of the working class, and the growth of a political class linked to the rest of society more or less solely via business lobbyists” (2004: VIII). This should be regarded as a response to the neoliberal policy which purports economic rejuvenation from below through participatory mechanisms (Brenner and Theodore 2002: 341). These arguments are helpful to understand the transformation of urban localities by municipalities presided by AKP as the leading actor of neoliberalism in Turkey. However in order to understand BDP as the political will mobilizing Kurdish municipalities, other categories and concepts are required.

Thus by bringing the research on Kurdish conflict in Turkey, social movements, municipalities and neoliberalism together, I assert that a new set of questions that has not been studied in depth emerges. First, why did it become

important for some actors to participate in local politics through an urban popular social movement? Secondly, how is this urban popular social movement transforming its locality – given that regionally their localities have been cast out of national macro development trajectory while operating within a neoliberal framework? Thirdly, what is the relationship between the reasons for local political participation and the mobilization of local offices? Before presenting answers to these questions and the argument of the thesis, the background of Diyarbakir and Van in terms of urban trajectories and municipal services should be laid out.

Urban Trajectories and Municipal Services of Diyarbakir and Van

In this subsection I provide background information of Diyarbakir and Van cases in terms of urban trajectories and municipal services. The urban trajectory of Diyarbakir has been under study more than Van; however the urban trajectory of Van can be discussed through studies elaborating similar cases. The urban trajectory have two aspects; expansion due to immigration and implementation of local nationalism.

Similarly, the success of municipal service delivery in Diyarbakir have been underlined by authors studying the locality; whereas service delivery in Van in the last years has only been put under scrutiny by a research which I have carried out (Kadirbeyoğlu and Sümer *forthcoming* 2012). In this subsection, I only refer to the physical conditions of municipal service delivery and underline the amount and conditions of labor force employed by Diyarbakir Metropolitan, Sur and Yenişehir Central District and Van Provincial municipalities where I conducted my interviews.

Yüksel's description and categorization of Diyarbakir's urban development are quite elaborate to understand the urban trajectory. The description below depicts

the four stages of urban development with respect to physical formation of urban centers and their content:

The sprawl of urban development in Diyarbakir, very basically consists of four major phases. In the 1930s, the city started to expand outside the ancient city—the Suriçi [Sur] district—as new neighborhoods emerged consisting of modern apartments, buildings of local state offices, boulevards and squares. In the 1950s this area, known as Yenişehir, first began to attract the upper-middle classes who ‘fancy modern life’ in apartments, and in the following years it gradually became the city’s commercial and administrative centre. Due to large land areas, which were reserved for a military base and an airport in the northern and western parts of the ancient city, the 1980s saw urban sprawl following a northwest axis and the emergence of suburban areas like the Bağlar district. After the 1980s, massive waves of migration, coupled with unplanned and uncontrolled urbanization, resulted in the spatial expansion of such suburban areas, as well as significant transformation of their demographic structure. Bağlar, now a district of almost 400,000 inhabitants, and Suriçi, which had begun to take in rural migrants even as early as the 1960s, now accommodate a myriad of vulnerable populations, including internally displaced persons and rural migrants. A fourth wave of urbanization mainly centered on the district of Kayapınar, which started in the mid-1990s. Formerly the village of Peyas, the area was redefined as a *belde* [town] to facilitate zoning and rapidly became a construction paradise in the late 1990s. The population has multiplied 30-fold over the last 20 years, and Kayapınar is expected to accommodate more than 240,000 people over the next decade. Compared with high-density areas like Bağlar, Suriçi or Yenişehir, Kayapınar is more sparsely populated and consists of apartment blocks and gated communities scattered around parks, shopping centers and larger arterial roads (2011: 449-450).

In parallel to urban expansion, Yüksel asserts that “the out-migration of the local elite families of Diyarbakir in the 1960s and 1970s prepared the conditions for a rather fast upward mobility of urban dwellers and rural migrants” (2012: 445). The change in social class and de-gentrification of the old city brought the squalor that continues up to date. These squatters and the new urban zone are the present day Yenişehir and Sur districts. With respect to Diyarbakir in general, Yenişehir and Sur districts have evolved, much similar to the city center of Van. As the physical geography of Van is different than Diyarbakir, the same urbanization sprawls have produced different results. I aim to construct a narrative on Van’s urban trajectory corresponding to the urban sprawls delineated above.

The first wave of immigrants arrived to Van, parallel to national trend, around the 1950s. The urban planning of the city was aimed to accommodate in accord with the population increase that was foreseen in the 1970s. The planning of the city was finalized before the displaced peasantry arrived, resulting in the similar problems faced by Diyarbakir. And this inevitably led to grave infrastructural shortages and superstructural problems when the population of the city officially quadrupled in the 1990s.²⁶

In Van the city expanded like an arc towards Erek Mountain farther away from the ancient city and the lake. While the city was relocated to its present location, its link with the lake was also severed. Most of the space that falls between the city and the lake has been developed by direct state investment for regional branches of various state institutions. These institutions are responsible for water, electricity, roads and telephone services that are planned and undertaken directly by the agents of the central governments following the governor's will. The lands they occupy are considerably large because they also include lodging, garages, parks and recreational quarters for their employees. Protected with walls and barbed wires, these complexes appear to have been designed for limiting the exposure of outside effects. Added to these, the airport, the railroad, the port and the military personnel lodgings also cut through the space between the city and the lake. All of these enclosed state complexes warded squatters off from reaching towards the lake. The residential areas owned by private parties that are in close proximity to these complexes belong to either middle class residents or communities that arrived to the city before the conflict.

²⁶ This is according to 1980 and 2000 public censuses. Retrieved August 18, 2012 from www.tuik.gov.tr.

In comparison to Diyarbakir, Van did not experience an urban sprout like the case of Kayapınar. The city is as if how Diyarbakir would be without the massive expansion towards Kayapınar. This is largely due to the fact that Van does not have the metropolitan stature and the discontinuity in municipal administrations. As this urban expansion is relevant to understanding how municipalities are mobilized, I aim to further refer to Yüksel's work (2011) to underpin this sprout. Firstly, the urban trajectory of Diyarbakir – with emphasis to its central district Kayapınar – calls for academic curiosity; as Yüksel underlines “land prices have multiplied 50-fold since 2005” (Yüksel 2011: 432) and because compared to other central districts of Diyarbakir and Van, the urbanized space is completely different. It is spacious, enormous, regular, neat, green, tall and modern looking. It is “modern looking” in the sense that it resembles its contemporary equivalents in other metropolitan cities in Turkey. There are gated communities unlike other urbanized spaces in the Region. In parallel, the municipality of Kayapınar has more resources than all other three central districts combined. The budget of the municipality is twice as much the budget of Van Provincial Municipality and the municipality has no debt, or infrastructure problems. The budget of the municipality is not under the burden of personnel salaries. In Yenişehir and Sur municipalities, the personnel salaries make up more than sixty percent of the overall budget.

The majority of constructions are undertaken by private sector in Kayapınar. TOKİ (Housing Development Administration of Turkey), the state institution responsible for providing mass housing has few completed housing areas. This shows that the district is yet profitable for entrepreneurs. TOKİ is the most advantageous institution in terms of building houses because of it is provided with scale economies, cheap land and legislative privileges. These advantages developed

in line with AKP government and as Yüksel asserts TOKİ was redefined by AKP in the early 2000s as “a site of political innovation and intervention” which is a “major pillar of [AKP]’s broader, populist, social policy” (Yüksel 2011: 440).

The urban expansion mode in Diyarbakir, especially in Kayapınar, shows that when the political climate relatively calmed down in the Region after 1999, the urban development of the city became more integrated to political economy trajectory of nationwide development. This happened when municipalities mobilized by Kurdish movement “found themselves not only in a tense relation with the central state, but also under the coercive rules of the competitive logic imposed by the economic transformation at the national, regional and global scales” (Yüksel 2011: 442) that corresponds to the neoliberal municipal reform in Turkey.

The second aspect of urban trajectories is based on local nationalism. Öktem argues that by focusing on the local, the previously unstudied aspects of local nationalisms can be discovered and he focuses on the case of Urfa to reveal the nation-building projects such as large-scale population exchanges or ethnic cleansing (Öktem 2004: 559). For the case of Turkey, Öktem schematizes how ethno-nationalist incorporation of time and space takes places geographical, nation-state wide, local, provincial and municipal scales (Öktem 2004: 565). His work offers many insights that I have been able observe and learn in Van and Diyarbakir that substantiates the relationship between the makings of local nationalism with urban development.

In case of Diyarbakir, Gambetti’s work (2009a) explicates how local nationalism was made with respect to urban development and then she shows how the municipality mobilized by Kurdish movement decolonizes the city. As no study has been made specific to Van and local nationalism or its decolonization by Kurdish

actors, I plan to refer to Öktem's (2004) schema to describe local nationalism; which are by the way also applicable for Diyarbakir. In terms of incorporation of space by ethno-nationalism makings on the scales of local, provincial and municipal, four of Öktem's schemas are applicable for Van. First, through the expulsion of Armenians ethnic cleansing was implemented. Second, by destroying ancient city cohabited by Muslim and Christian populations, the houses and places of worship of the 'other' was destroyed. Third, certain local notables were given concessions, land and political privileges after the repression of the Ararat rebellion which created a group of loyal beneficiaries.²⁷ Fourth, as the latest deed of the current governor, reconstruction of the architectural and cultural heritage, which leaves traces of the 'other' was accomplished when a mosque was built on top of the castle next to the ancient city. In terms of incorporation of time on the same scales, three other schemas stand out to be applicable in Van. First, there are inscriptions of nationalist symbols and slogans on hills visible to all. Second, residents (mostly Kurdish) resist as they tend to use the old names of places.²⁸ Third, the collective memory of adherents to Kurdish movement resist to official historiographies, as also studied by Ege (2011). All these aspects brought together with urban development trajectory of Van indicate that the city scale was nationalized while security and surveillance incentives ensured a spatially well protected local nationalism. This background bears importance for actors mobilizing municipalities as it became a source of grievance of exclusion of Kurdish identity from all spheres of urban and social life.

²⁷ These groups of loyal beneficiaries whom amassed property and wealth due their privileged status in the city have been exceedingly challenged by arriving Kurdish peasants since the 1970s. To my observation, I have found that the antagonistic political positions between these groups and Kurds have been finding opportunities of re-articulation, in the post-conflict situation, parallel to what Öktem examines for the case of Mardin (Öktem 2005: 241).

²⁸ In another study, Öktem argues that Turkification was achieved "by destruction of the status quo *ex ante* that is the pre-national, heterogenous toponymical order and by the construction of a system of place names reflecting the nascent national order of time and space" (2008: 1).

The last subject of this subsection is thus municipal services and physical capacities of the municipalities at hand. I refer to the interviews with municipal employees,²⁹ municipal documents³⁰ and authors³¹ who studied these cases. These sources signal that these municipalities have certain constraints due to over employment, resource deficiencies and political pressures which pin down the administrators when undertaking services.

During the term of 1994-1999 RP governed both Diyarbakir and Van municipalities as the flock of the displaced reached its maximum. In the 1990s, the previous inhabitants were also leaving the city; drastically affecting the urban economic life.³² This has changed the constituency and their demands. When HADEP won these municipalities in 1999, problems of the past were added to more and immediate problems when the newly populated zones emerged.

The most significant project of Çelik as the mayor of Diyarbakir was the demolition of squatters next to the city walls. The municipality cleared the houses almost attached the city walls and turned these areas into parks. Meanwhile, the

²⁹ To understand the conditions of the municipality and urban expansion and also to triangulate the claims of councilors, I also interviewed Head of Zoning and Planning and Human Resources personnel at Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality, and the appointed assisting mayor of Kayapınar. For a research regarding the municipal services in Van, we had previously interviewed the heads of Transportation, Sewage, Technical Works and Cleaning Services departments (Kadirbeyoğlu and Sümer forthcoming 2012).

³⁰ These documents are the Strategic Planning for 2009-2014, Activity Reports of municipalities in between 2009-2011 and budgets which are available online.

³¹ Gambetti (2006, 2009a), Jongerden (2009) and Watts (2006, 2010) have written elaborately on the constraints these municipalities face and the innovative measures it leads them to undertake. Öktem (2006: 5) argues that after 2006, AKP have initiated politics of disengagement with these municipalities to politically suffocate their service delivery capacities. Gambetti, Jongerden and Watts have all pointed out that these municipalities resorted to EU funds for service delivery as an innovative measure; however after 2009 local elections, according to the interviewees, especially these municipalities have been stripped off these funds as well since the funds ratification became a prerogative of the ministry of the interior. As such, Van municipality has never had the opportunity to develop projects for EU funds as did municipalities in Diyarbakir.

³² Yüksel traces the reasons of business people leaving the city in the 1990s due to political and economic events. These reasons dwell around security, education and economic opportunities (Yüksel 2011: 445:446).

municipality began solving infrastructural problems such as sewage and water. These efforts gained pace under Baydemir administration. The transportation system was improved and new roads were built. As of now, the infrastructural problems of the city have been taken care of by the municipality. There is also a reasonable amount of superstructure investment. Compared to Van, Diyarbakir's immediate problems related to municipal services have been solved and infrastructure of the expanding city laid out for further expansion.

When HADEP won the municipality of Van in 1999, it was not a result of popular mobilization driven to mobilize the municipality to deliver much needed services. It was due to a local coalition of emerging urban actors and elites which the movement attempted to co-opt but failed. This local coalition broke down after internal strife affecting the delivery of the municipal services after the second year. This damaged the credibility and popularity of the movement. But also, the administration was not able to accumulate knowledge and resources to solve problems or pass on.

Learning from their previous mistakes and taking advantage of public dislike of AKP administration, the movement was able to win the 2009 local elections. There were many cliques in the party and tribal interventions to the municipality leading to a discord between the mayor and the movement. Seeing the complexity of local dynamics and the power of local cliques and tribes, the movement nominated Bekir Kaya as mayor in 2009. Kaya is a lawyer and a graduate of the Faculty of Law at Diyarbakir Dicle University and worked for Asrın Law Firm³³ before he moved to Van. In Van, he worked in the field of Human Rights and became a known local

³³ Asrın Law Firm is an integral part of the movement in the sense that lawyers working at the firm represent Abdullah Öcalan. The lawyers had been travelling to Isle of İmralı weekly to receive Öcalan's inculcations for the movement. Since the summer of 2011, the meeting between Öcalan and his lawyers are not allowed by the government and many lawyers have been arrested as part of KCK court case. Bekir Kaya is also arrested since June 2012 on similar charges.

figure like Baydemir. Personally Kaya is not from Van and has no family or tribal affiliations in the city. His involvement in the field of law, commitment to the movement and distance to the local power loci and structure made him a perfect candidate. The movement wanted to establish dominance of its principles and interest of the masses over the local struggles of power.

Upon his election, the movement in Van followed the footsteps of Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality to mobilize the municipality to solve the problems of the city. Since 2009, the municipality cleared debts owed to private parties, restructured debts owed to state institutions and carried out certain services that were deemed to be compelling by the locals. However these services and policies of the municipality cannot be accounted for long term strategies to conduce a new urban development trajectory for the city, as many councilors concurred. Especially in terms of zoning plans, the municipality failed to bring forward a new trajectory. Now this problem is at the hands of TOKİ and central planning agencies because of the devastating earthquake in October 2011 in Van.

Yenişehir and Sur District Municipalities are the worse off central district municipalities in Diyarbakir. They have much less population than Bağlar so get less monetary resources; have relatively no construction sector so their revenues are less than Kayapınar. Seventy percent of their budget paid salaries before 2011³⁴ and this number decreased to around six to eight percent after *Torba Yasa*.³⁵ This leaves the

³⁴ Sur Belediyesi Faaliyet Raporu 2011 [The Municipality of Sur Activity Report of 2011]. Retrieved June 25, 2012 from sur.bel.tr/turkce/. Yenişehir Belediyesi Stratejik Plan 2009-2014 [The Municipality of Yenişehir Strategic Plan 2009-2014]. Retrieved June 25, 2012 from www.diyarbakiryenisehir.bel.tr/.

³⁵ Torba Yasa means “Sack of Laws” to define series of legislations consecutively adapted in 2011. As a part of one of the amendment, the municipalities were given the opportunity to determine unnecessary personnel to be transferred to other state institutions. Sur and Yenişehir Municipalities claim that the legislation was not fully exercised in their cases. I discuss this in the penultimate chapter in detail.

municipality very little resources to buy services, thus forcing them to deliver services by making with their personnel.

Diyarbakir and Van municipalities are better off in terms of budget and personnel salaries ratio which comply with the thirty percent threshold. But both need to employ more personnel in order to carry out daily services. The parastatal company Diyar belonging to Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality was not ratified by the council of ministers. The metropolitan municipality cannot access to flexible labor market making them dependent on the contractors. The municipality of Van, on the other hand owns the parastatal company Mavikent through which the municipality can employ or lay off personnel thus access a more flexible labor source.

Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality was able to increase its resources through expanding construction sector whereas Van Municipality could not. This has forced the administration in Van to meticulously use the resources and negotiate with private owners who defied urban planning when constructing houses. This constrains the municipality to build roads and infrastructure rapidly. As enforcement through law is costly in terms of political gains, the municipality administrators feel need to negotiate with grassroots and private owners to enforce zoning plans by convincing the private owners.

Argument and the Structure of the Thesis

After the 1980 coup d'état, two societal realities in Turkey which had been cast out into the periphery of geography, politics and development gradually began consolidating their positions: Islamists and Kurds. Both groups have faced

persecution; Kurds more severe than Islamists due to the armed resistance. With RP, Islamists captured metropolitan municipalities and enjoyed parliamentary majority in the 1990s. The warning from the military in 1998, referred as the post-modern coup brought them down. As Islamists split into two groups, AKP under the leadership of Erdoğan – Istanbul’s previously deposed mayor – rose to power in 2002. In the 2007 general elections, AKP consolidated its position further. Underpinning that this electoral success in both general and local elections is due to the moderation,

Demiralp asks:

This major decline in support for radicalism signaled important changes taking place within the Turkish Islamist movement and raised critical questions. What was the process that led to this moderation? Was it a tactic, or was it sincere? Most interestingly, why a moderate movement initiated by the same group of people, the provincial entrepreneurs who used to be the vanguards of radical Islamic policies in the first place (2009: 315)?

Demiralp (2009) argues that the rise of Islamic capital brought the decline of Islamic radicalism and moderation while from periphery Islamists marched to center. But then the critical question is: what happened within Kurdish movement and in the Region during relative democratization after 1999 until 2004 while Islamists became moderate and marched to the center? Did Kurds stay in the periphery; or where are they marching? Gökalp offers answers to these questions:

Following the 1990s, the Kurdish question in Turkey has [re]surfaced as 1) a problem of political legitimacy between the state and (Kurdish) citizens affected by conflict and displacement 2) an ethno-nationalist claim, 3) a poverty and social citizenship problem. ... *First*, I propose that new dynamics have been introduced into the state/center-citizen/periphery relations, through which ‘legitimate’ Kurdish citizens and secure spaces/geographies are distinguished by the Turkish state in contrast to the ‘illegitimate,’ ‘so-called,’ ‘undeserving’ and/or ‘suspicious’ ones. This process, in turn, brought in question the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of the displaced Kurdish citizens. *Second*, previously existing Kurdish contention has turned into an ethno-political issue, which is entrenched among the Kurdish masses mired in poverty in the urban centers of southeastern Turkey. *Finally*, the discontents of neoliberal restructuring in the form of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion have converged with the ethnicized discontent prevailing among the Kurdish masses in the city centers in southeastern Turkey. Kurds did not

stay in the periphery nor did they march to the designated center of the Turkish state (Gökalp 2007: 3-4, emphasis from the original text).

In her research Gökalp focuses primarily on the forced displacement³⁶ to support these arguments. In this thesis, I focus on Kurdish local actors within the movement as challengers. As Watts argues (2010: 13) as “Kurdish challengers gained access to state-allocated material, legal and political resources that were unavailable to those using armed contention” through their increasing participation in electoral politics and winning offices after 1999; what Turkish state produced as its own periphery began constituting itself as a novel geographical and political center. For Kurdish actors, local politics became the equivalent of national politics. In this sense, this thesis contributes to Watts’ work and offers a contrast to scholars studying the evolution and transformation of political Islam in Turkey. It does this so, by taking a step back and looking into life trajectories of local political actors belonging to Kurdish movement and motivating reasons and factors of participation to local politics.

The argument of the thesis is that local politics became central to Kurdish actors because the experience in mobilizing municipalities have given them the opportunity to address grievances – which developed predominantly due to the conflict. The project of Democratic Autonomy has given them a framework through which they can articulate how they want to mobilize local governments could be articulated and would be constituted. In this sense, Kurdish movement as a popular urban social movement is situated against ill-effects of neoliberalism and is mindful

³⁶ There is no exact number of how many peasants were displaced. Jongerden (2005: 235) writes that Turkish government estimates between 3000 and 4000 villages and hamlets were depopulated affecting 350,000 to 380,000 people, while on the other hand, human rights organizations estimate this number to be 1, 5 or 4 million. The difference in numbers is due to interpretation of state officials and NGO’s on what constitutes forced displacement (Ayata and Yüksel 2005: 15-16). Kurds in Turkey have been considered as Internally Displaced People and their conditions have been subject of numerous researchers (Kurban et. al 2006).

of the conflict and would like to determine the collective consumption at the local and regional level through participatory mechanism to counter problems induced by both contexts.

This thesis has five chapters; (i) Introduction, (ii) Research Design and Methods, (iii) Life Trajectories and Getting Elected, (iv) Kurdish Urban Politics in the Neoliberal Era and (v) Conclusion. The first chapter supplied the background for the thesis and situated the research question. In the second chapter, the research design, methods and mode of analysis is discussed. The third chapter addresses why participation to local politics became central to Kurdish actors. The penultimate chapter dwells on how Kurdish actors mobilize municipalities.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Ethnography can produce otherwise unobtainable insight into politics, which can be counterintuitive to understandings developed without an insider perspective and which can allow us, in turn, to better understand macro-level political process.³⁷

Of the beauty of the site it would not be possible to speak too highly; I tremble to provoke in my English reader a nausea of descriptive writing. The Armenians have a proverb which is often quoted: "*Van in this world and paradise in the next.*"³⁸

In this chapter, I state the research design of this thesis. This research is composed of both ethnographic immersion and in-depth interviews with municipal councilors and personnel. The ethnographic research design requires that I contextualize space and time of the research and discuss my entry to the field. Thus, the research design is followed by explaining the political climate during the research. And in the methods subsection, I reflectively assess my entry into field, what I have learned from my researcher position and how these experiences have informed on the topic of local activists and municipality organizing.

As for the rest of the chapter, I further discuss purpose of examining life trajectories as the main tenet of my research and mode of analysis. I finalize the

³⁷ Bayard de Volo (2009: 234).

³⁸ Lynch's description (1901: 83) of Van a century ago, I thank Turan Keskin for pointing out for me. The locals in Van often still articulate something parallel to "Van in this world and paradise in the next" in Turkish: *dünya'da Van, ahrette iman*.

chapter with briefly discussing the following chapters with respect to which sort of data is used and which research questions these chapters address.

The Research Design

The Question: Why urban politics became integral for Kurdish movement and how Kurdish movement is mobilizing municipalities of Diyarbakir and Van in the 2000s when the ongoing conflict intersects with neoliberal transformations at the local government level in Turkey? What is the extent to which the motivating factors and reasons for local politics are realized while mobilizing municipalities; given the structural constraints of the conflict and neoliberalism?

In order to grasp how BDP was mobilizing municipalities, I aimed at focusing on nominated and elected local actors of the party in the municipalities: the municipal councilors. I extended my interviews to certain bureaucrats and municipality employees in order to learn about validity of the points raised by councilors; especially on topics that were either technical or unknown to councilors.

I initially raised three questions to be addressed via semi-structured interviews with municipal councilors. What are the life trajectories of BDP's elected local actors – mainly municipal councilors – that lead to their mobilization within municipalities? How were they nominated, how did municipal councilors organize during the elections and how do they still continue organizing? What are their experiences as municipal councilors of BDP with respect to accomplishments, aspirations and impediments?

The Design: This research is a political ethnography where I used immersion into activist circles, semi-structured interviews, observation, and participant-

observation and examination of legal and textual materials produced by both the state and the municipalities. I immersed into activist circles in Van and visited Diyarbakir and other localities to meet with their extended circles. I conducted interviews with thirty six people (sixteen people in Van and twenty people in Diyarbakir); twenty five of them were municipal councilors and the rest of them municipality employees. The councilors I interviewed in Diyarbakir are from Sur and Yenisehir Central District Municipalities and municipality employees work for the Metropolitan Municipality. The council of the metropolitan municipality is composed of councilors of the four central district municipalities, and I chose not to interview councilors who attended both district and metropolitan municipalities because I wanted to delve more into local space instead of whole metropolitan area.

I followed council sessions of Van municipality and Van Provincial Assembly (May-June 2011) consecutively for three months; I spent three weeks in Diyarbakir in two consecutive months (1 Week in February 2012, 2 Weeks in March 2012) to conduct my interviews and attend to council sessions of Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality, Sur and Yenisehir District Municipalities and Diyarbakir Provincial Assembly.

To understand the dynamics of BDP's local politics, I employed interpretivist political ethnography (Schatz 2009) even though ethnography "is far from a common method in political science (Bayard de Volo 2009: 217). As such I am not a trained ethnographer, (nor do I claim to be one) so I learned employing the method as the research went along. And since I was in the presence of the people I studied and made a long term commitment, I regarded this method to be feasible.

The four qualities of interpretivist political ethnography are that (i) knowledge is viewed as historically situated and entangled in power relations, (ii) the

world of things and persons are studied as socially made phenomena, (iii) individualist assumptions are eschewed and (iv) language and other symbolic systems fall are studied (Weeden 2009: 80-81). In doing so, I aimed to understand the culture of local politics following Zirakzadeh (2009: 115) who suggests that “culture must be understood anthropologically and democratically, as the result of the capacity in all humans to adjust their beliefs, construct words and coin images”.

Why Compare Diyarbakir and Van? I chose Diyarbakir and Van because of their cultural and geographical proximity, parallel urban development trajectories, high levels of poverty and unemployment, underdevelopment induced by the conflict and displaced peasantry, their social and cultural hegemony over their peripheries and similar immigration patterns towards these cities; as delineated in the introduction.

These cases offer a semi-longitudinal level of comparison in order to look into BDP’s national and regional policy on local governments. Diyarbakir became a metropolitan municipality in 1994 and RP won the first municipality administration. Diyarbakir metropolitan municipality and four district municipalities under its jurisdiction were won by HADEP in 1999. Osman Baydemir became the mayor in 2004 and was reelected in 2009. Within the last four terms of municipality administration of Van, which is a provincial municipality unlike Diyarbakir, HADEP beat incumbent RP in 1999 but AKP won the local elections in 2004, yet again lost it to DTP administration (now BDP) in 2009. The five year discontinuity in Van offers a leverage of contextualizing and comparing the histories of BDP organizing in the municipalities with respect to last two terms where most of the neoliberal reforms actually took place.

Space and time of the research: I was in the city to begin my new job at the university when I first went to the municipality in Van in February 2010. I just asked to observe the session to the municipality employees. They said they needed to ask the acting president of the council. I met the president, and he told me that I was more than welcome to attend because their policy is transparent. Despite the fact that sessions were made monthly and open to public after the municipal reform in 2005, each time I entered a research field, I received the same treatment.

During the break, I went to recess room with BDP councilors and drank tea with them. They asked my purpose of visit, and I told them I wanted to write my MA thesis on the topic of BDP municipalities. I was received quite well. Some even cracked jokes like, “Well, you should tell us what we are then.” These jokes often made the psychologically burdening fieldwork bearable for me.

Even though DTP had just been dissolved and due to KCK court case people were arrested, the political climate was not pessimistic or suspicious. No one doubted me or my sincerity. I also made my face known. I went back to the municipality in May 2011 and I conducted my interviews in the summer, mostly in July. The political climate was quite dynamic because of the 2011 general elections in June. The annual break for council session was in June. During May and June, I followed councilors, collected their contacts to meet them for an interview after the elections.

My fieldwork in Diyarbakir overlapped with the celebration of Newroz: the celebration of March Equinox. The municipalities of the movement have been a central part of organizing the celebrations (Demirer 2012: 101, Gambetti 2005: 60) which is an important political spectacle of the movement. Due to the time limitations, it was harder to get the interviews.

Doing the fieldwork two years after the elections and with two more years to go for the next election has been helpful in the sense that I was not interviewing politicians and local agents interested in defending their campaign objectives. This was a period when the informants were fully motivated to speak, discuss and contemplate on local governments.

Methods

This research studies two localities with two complementary yet different research fields. First research field was the municipalities. It was based on observations and interviews. The fieldwork consisted of multiple sites, two cases yet four municipalities. Due to stature of Diyarbakir as a metropolitan municipality, I also attended two affiliated central district municipalities:³⁹ Yenişehir and Sur. Most of my findings dwell on the first research field with multiple sites. However I owe much of my courage to enter these research sites, to formulate questions and to decide how to seek them to my engagement in the Region and immersion into activist circles.

Second research field was the time I spent within social and political spheres through engaging ethnography. I was welcomed to a circle of people who are BDP officials, journalists, Human Rights activists, feminists and teachers mostly from Van. This circle of people and their acquaintances extended to proximate cities such as Diyarbakir, Mardin, Bitlis and Hakkari where I also had chances to explore, observe and engage with their activities. As Gambetti observes, these subject-positions have translated into identities competing with the Kurdish identity

³⁹ Councilors of metropolitan municipality assemblies are formed by councilors from central district municipalities.

cultivated by the movement (Gambetti 2005: 66) and this allowed me to gain a leverage to see certain conflicts and contradictions where I could better engage and critically assess my observations. And some of these people became very dear friends with whom I spent my leisure time. Through my immersion into this circle (Schatz 2009: 5), I was able to learn much about the recent history and collect ethnographic data.

Especially on the topics of what happened in the 1990s, how Kurdish movement changed, what were their pretenses in organizing or quitting it and what sort of criticisms laid behind their exit from the movement, how they saw the contemporary events, I was able to receive numerous and diverse accounts which allowed me to strip from idolization of my research and see the complexity of issues. This circle proved to be quite resourceful for my personal development because narration of past events, tragedies, ironies was the fundamental of our daily conversations making collecting ethnographic data relevant to my research (Becker 1998: 210). Meanwhile, it helped me learn a new vocabulary and I soon began to see the geography and the interrelatedness of localities which the administrative map of Turkey does not provide on paper.

When I entered the municipalities for my research, I did not resort to any of my acquaintances to be mediators for my entry or an interview. I went to the department of editorial services at the municipality to ask if I could observe the council sessions. In Van, I petitioned to get the previous council minutes but in the other cases I did not examine the previous minutes to help me understand follow up debates but in Diyarbakir there was no need because there was hardly any debate. During breaks or after the council sessions, I approached councilors, stated my research interest as local government focusing on municipalities presided by BDP

and told them my wish to conduct an interview. I would usually give out a business card that I had printed out and ask for a telephone number or address to make an appointment. Soon after the entry, I would figure out in which rooms councilors pass their time in the municipality building and started visiting occasionally. I did drop by for two reasons; in cases when I could not secure an appointment and to observe.

After being welcomed to these rooms I had more chances to observe the interaction between councilors, people, municipality workers and party officials. I had the best chance of hearing spoken Kurdish in these rooms mainly because my acquaintances would prefer speaking Turkish with me and to each other in my presence. The time I spent in these rooms, waiting and observing in fact informed me greatly on understanding dynamics between councilors, comparatively more in Van. I followed councilors everywhere; their meeting, sessions, press conferences, protests, celebrations, cultural events, workplaces, weddings, courthouses. This is another aspect that helped to garner trust.

Through these observations, I was able to converse with my acquaintances and gain more insight on the local dynamics of councillorship. One could say that I have resorted to gossip for learning more about my informants. I only asked about issues that on topics such as tribe affiliation, personal reputation or intraparty cliques. Bayard de Volo and Schatz point out that “examining gossip, jokes, and other informal speech acts for their underlying assumptions” are part of ethnographic data collection (2004: 267).

Entry to the field was not hard but getting interviews required voluntary participation. Thinking that it may sever voluntary participation, I did contact neither mayor nor other party officials or did not bring official paper from the university. I aimed at forming a bond of rapport between myself and informants. My rationale

served well since I was focusing on lives of my informants. I chose to insist more in the beginning to get their contacts and this usually took place in front of other councilors; the effect of a spectator made the job relatively easy. After contacting and failing to set an interview for few times or sense unwillingness, I chose to give up. No one actually rebuffed me, instead I was stalled. I did not mind being stalled much; I sought interviews with other councilors instead.

There was a trust issue at hand. Having seen many of their peers arrested unjustly in their eyes with trivial evidence, giving an interview to an unknown person could have also entailed a danger. I could sense this uneasiness most of the time; I looked it as a challenge for me to establish trust with my attitude and language. The demeanors I have picked up living in the Region greatly served me to gain an initial trust and helped “to dispel the notion that the researcher is affiliated with government agencies, a frequent fear of the residents of high-violence localities” (Arias 2009: 245). After having few interviews done and appearing in the sessions, getting more interviews became relatively easier. It is hard to actually convey my research intention in a hurry thus I suspect the information of a completed interview which circulated among peers facilitated my subsequent interviews. Sometimes my persistence to show up in the meetings or set up an interview would help, and on occasion it made me proud when my informants underlined an admiration for my insistence.

I preferred to use a voice recorder for the interviews but seven out of twenty five did not agree to it. It was harder in Diyarbakir to get a recording than in Van, probably because of the short amount of time I spent in Diyarbakir and the increase of volatility of the political environment in time. Only in two interviews I chose not to use the recorder; one time the room was crowded and noisy and the second time a

councilor started speaking with me while I was waiting with them in front the court house in Diyarbakir.

In Van, I was more successful in getting interviews with municipal councilors and gathered a larger scope of experiences. I owe this to be living in the city. However in comparison, in Diyarbakir I was able to get more insights into how neoliberalism was experienced, I suspect mainly due to the fact that my informants in Diyarbakir were part of the municipalities for a longer term and that Diyarbakir is bigger city where narrative on macro problems circulate. I was able to gather meaningful and complementary interviews from both localities.

My position as a researcher was most challenging when interviews were over. This time the informants had the chance to pose questions and I needed to answer. The primary question in the Region is, and will continue to be for a long time, *where are you from*. I was struggling to give a straight answer to this question every time. The truth to the matter I was the third generation urbanite but an uprooted one so I indeed was an Istanbulite. But my informants were mostly first generation urbanites with ongoing ties to their rural backgrounds. My experience with urban localities to theirs was incommensurable. Thus the most common conversation starter question in the Region was null and devoid in my case. Sometimes the intention of the question was not about learning about my hometown but to understand whether I was Kurdish or not. I did not mind the questions except that it usually put me into a social impasse. However I was not made to feel like an “outsider.” My research purpose was to understand their positions, but the informants also wanted to know about my position and experience to determine the distance between mine and theirs (Schatz 2009: 6-7). On occasions I concealed some of my ideas but sometimes I found the conversations stimulating thus presented my arguments and findings briefly. This

allowed me to receive comments on my work. In a way, my initial feedbacks on the research came from some of the informants.

Doing extensive fieldwork and engaging ethnography in the Region proved to be psychologically frustrating and emotionally burdensome. I was not able to strip myself from the sensibility I developed through my choice of method (Schatz 2009: 4) nor could I have even if I wanted to do so. The names of interviewees are not used in the thesis to preserve anonymity. Excerpts from the interviews appear with only a number attached to indicate the original text in the appendices with the time of the interview and place. I have not handed out signed papers to my informants indicating my purpose of the research and in accord with research ethics all data I gathered would be used specifically for research purposes. In a period of time when drivers of the municipalities were arrested on charges of being “KCK transportation teams”, I chose specifically not to do so. The evidence, data and findings I gathered for this research and its consequences are entirely my own and I have not collaborated or worked with another person during my research. The excerpts which appear in the text are left anonymous with only place and date and numerated to point to the original language at the appendix section.

My exit from the field came with an abrupt end due to a natural disaster. I was hoping to complete two years in Van, conduct my field work in Diyarbakir in the meanwhile and write my thesis. But I was not able to return to the city after the earthquake due to the fact that it was winter and I could not find a suitable flat. However the social ties I have established in Van are still intact. In the case of Diyarbakir, it was for a short term and I communicated my duration of stay with my informants. Occasionally, I stated that I was living in Van until the earthquake for more than a year and I was travelling to conduct my research.

I have three issues that I regard to be limitations of my methodology. Ethnography is based on the inter-subjective plane between the researcher and the social group under study. I was continually assessed by the people around me in terms of whether I could be trusted or I could handle certain claims, facts or opinions circulating among local activists. The negotiation of whether I should be told something or not, seemed to happen in person's mind, in my absence or as if telepathically between people. In this sense, I cannot grasp the degree of which I was informed on circulation of events in the urban localities. I make do with the limited data and observation I have through the nature of immersion.

Secondly, I abstain from disclosing numerous aspects, events and experiences I gained through my immersion. In a sense, I disregard some of my data, not because it is inconsistent or inconclusive, but because it disrupts the main narrative of my thesis. I believe this is resulting from my immersion which I sometimes consider as biting off more than I could chew.

Thirdly, I was immersed into a male-dominated world of activists although my informants would deny this is so. This does not mean I was not informed about the gender perspective by women activists but very limited compared to the rest. Thus the analysis in this thesis about gender issues is limited.

Mode of Analysis

Purpose of Exploring Local Actors' Life Trajectories

In order to understand why and how local politics became central for the Kurdish movement I examined the life trajectories of BDP's local actors elected as municipal

councilors. I further address the relevance of this question and discuss reliability and validity issues.

But why did I choose councilors and not mayors, administrators and party officials? And why did I conduct ethnography backed with semi-structured interviews instead of elite interviews and demographic surveys?

Without ethnography, I would have had to rely upon the “public face” of the organization in determining why these women organized and what their goals were, and thus I would have missed much of meaning they attributed to membership and their definition of benefits. The ethnographic approach generated new questions based upon my participant observation and interviews, guiding me to emic or insider understanding of the organization, a perspective too commonly absent from social-movement research (Bayard de Volo 2009: 220).

Just like Bayard de Volo wanted to learn more about women’s organizing beyond the “public face”, I wanted to learn more about local actors as beyond “idols” of the movement and “enemies” of the state. I wanted to pursue the moments or events that led to politics. Thus asking about how someone’s life was relevant to the topic. The narratives flowed towards these moments or events by themselves. I merely had to ask where and when they were born. The willingness of the informant established the flow of narration. In face of repression and persecution, “the personal” was easy to talk about. The informants were glibly able to convey the extent of personal experience in their political motivation and the effect of personal history to aspire them to run for the elections.

In order to understand motivating factors behind participation, organization and mobilization in local politics, I believe the fundamental route is to seek narratives of local actors leading up to their engagement in politics. Through these narratives I trace the economic, social, cultural, historical and political reasons in their background of politics and the processes of their participation in local politics

through BDP. In this step, I aim to keep inclusion and participation to BDP as a constant and to see the diverse and consistent paths leading up to it.

I was able to follow patterns of inclusion and to understand certain structures that lead to inclusion and exclusion. However I do not have extensive data to underpin patterns of exclusion (not participation) because the thesis focuses on those who were included in local politics. Patterns of inclusion and participation can better inform on the larger structure of local politics of BDP. My purpose is not to reveal all these patterns but to understand dynamics of mobilization in the municipalities with the given elected officials. I hope to construct a narrative that explains these processes (Becker 1998: 57).

I want to lay out questions that have challenged me while addressing the question on life trajectories. I continually asked these questions to myself because I sensed the risk of being enmeshed to issues taken for granted and “to make sense of otherwise bewildering, unimaginable, or seemingly irrational practices” (Bayard de Volo 2009: 227-228) that would not make sense for the research in the end. These questions are whether life stories really matter in politics; the extent to which personal experience can motivate towards political participation; whether personal histories can be a reason for nomination and election; whether motivation or material interest can be virtually available to an observer or researcher.

While analyzing the content of my interviews, I was able to see the extent to which these questions were addressed. I reveal that life stories indeed matter in politics, especially when political participation is in fact a central vein of the story. The extent to which experience motivates towards political participation is observable when both experience and motivation are clearly linked. For this research the link established in the narratives has been also able to convey the reason for

nomination. Still it is difficult to validate whether the actual personal experience narrated is indeed the reason for participation. This had been a daunting question but the fieldwork proved otherwise. The informants easily revealed their aspirations, projects and frustrations as municipal councilors, which were related to their experience in the municipalities

I am confident that none of my informants had any intention whatsoever to distort or exaggerate events to prove a point. At the least, it was more problematic for me, on occasions, to ask and learn about some of the events to their full extent. The informants usually stressed the traumatizing effect of witnessing such events and abstained to delineate. I also did not insist on getting the full picture.

Dimensions of Trajectories and Analysis of Narratives

The data analyzed is based on twenty five semi structured interviews. In Van, I interviewed sixteen councilors; only three of them were women. In Diyarbakir, I interviewed nine councilors; five councilors at Yenışehir District Municipality and four councilors at Sur District Municipality. I was able to interview two women councilors at Yenışehir District Municipality. Even though the women's quota in BDP is 40 percent, the numbers of women at these municipalities are approximately twenty percent (Van 20%, Yenışehir 30%, and Sur 10%). This is due to arrangement of candidate lists where the quota is applied to the whole list and the women candidates mostly end up last in the list.

I have divided the interview questions relevant to this chapter into six complementary dimensions for purposes of analytical clarity and analysis. These dimensions underpin how these interviews were indeed semi-structured. Each of

these dimensions is derived from sets of questions. First set of questions are related to personal information; year and place of birth, education, occupation, work experience and hometown. Second set of questions aimed at understanding personal experiences that cut across Kurdish conflict and Kurdish movement(s). Thirdly, I directed questions that led to the elaboration of the motivating factors and reasons of participation. Fourthly, through the answers of second and third set of questions I asked about background in active politics. This led to the fifth dimension with questions regarding nomination, elections and candidateship processes. The final dimension is about the urban experience and adaptation which is mostly in between lines of the first five dimensions based both on experience and witnessing of the displaced peasantry due to conflict.

The answers to personal information set the base for how I asked the rest of the questions. I utilized pieces of information such as education, occupation and work experience to ask about their relevance to politics. These appear mostly in between lines of the other dimensions. This is due largely to the fact that I could not find any patterns of age, occupation or gender that lead to inclusion in local politics. This indicates that merit and expertise are not dominant factors for nomination. The factors that lead to inclusion in BDP's local politics is mostly embedded in political struggle and social organization. The only piece of information that is meaningful alone is the variance of hometowns. It helps to map the social and cultural hinterland of Diyarbakir and Van underpinning intraregional dependence.

The second dimension is about personal experiences of being a citizen of Turkey with Kurdish origin while witnessing social and political events in the Region. The analysis of this data has multiple layers. The dominant layers are Kurdish conflict and Kurdish movements(s). Kurdish conflict pertains to social,

political and economic problems that people in the Region face since the establishment of Republic of Turkey in the 1920s. The narratives falling under Kurdish conflict are personal experiences or family histories. I analyze these narratives depending on chronological frames and spatial differences. These chronological frames are the pre-1970s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.⁴⁰ While the narratives underpin coherence of general experience due to living in the Region, there are different experiences deriving from spatial differences based on rural or urban backgrounds which are constituted as differences in terms of political and economic orientation. The specific locations, such as Diyarbakir or Van, are not dominant indicators however their cultural and social hegemony over their rural hinterland is important.

Kurdish movement(s), another dominant layer, appears in the narratives as well. I sought how Kurdish conflict and Kurdish movement(s) have affected lives, livelihoods and life decisions of the councilors. I base the analysis on aspects that appear in the narratives as personal instead of following statements that define meta-historical narratives. Through compilation of these personal experiences belonging to different chronological frames, I plan to put together a picture of BDP's locally elected officials and their personal backgrounds. The time frame allows for a better understanding of the evolution of local party politics.

Following the picture of how local party politics evolved at the intersection of Kurdish conflict and Kurdish movement(s); I identify the motivating factors and reasons of participating in Kurdish movement. BDP represents a single Kurdish movement that follows the tradition of the previously dissolved political parties. Thus the analysis underpins the motivation of BDP's local actors initially to

⁴⁰ The content of the narratives has conveyed me to make an analysis based on chronological frames divided as decades.

participate in BDP and eventually to run for local elections. I do not suggest that the interviews were able to grasp all factors and reasons behind motivation. Thus I deem that it would be appropriate for the analysis to form a distinction between contextually embedded and other motivating factors. The contextually embedded factors and reasons depend on the political climate of the time of the interview and the conditions of the municipality. General factors and reasons, on the other hand, relate to goals and ideals before and after getting office. The analysis in itself does not conclude to reveal a general picture however it serves as an interim framework for situating political action and demands of the party.

The fourth dimension regarding the background in politics is the analysis of complementing sectors of urban life and politics that make up the local politics of BDP and how participating in these sectors cultivate a novel political identity. The analysis focuses on the step that is taken after hearing, witnessing, seeing and being affected. By pursuing political action and organizing, I revisit dimensions regarding personal experience and motivation. There are four categories that define background in politics up until election; previously elected in local offices, active member of the party, part of other social and political organizations and sympathizers. Narratives in each category are differently related to personal experience and motivation. The important question to address with regard to sympathizers is to underpin what intervening factor swayed their minds for active participation. This analysis locates tactics of BDP in broadening its local cadres while revealing what sorts of personal backgrounds are deemed sufficient for immediate inclusion. Those who were previously elected or were active members of the party have different categories of personal experience where organizing in the movement and Kurdish conflict converged. In a way, these categories present cases where all dimensions are

clinched. Narratives deriving from being part of other social and political organizations are quite parallel to the previous two categories and usually overlap; yet these offer points of understanding the larger picture of Kurdish movement. Analyzing this larger picture should allow to see what other branches of the movement's organizing is seen relevant and fit to serve in local politics. I assert that this is directly linked to the ways in which the municipalities are mobilized.

As the fifth dimension, I further analyze how nomination, candidanship and election took place. This analysis firstly serves to grasp the moment of decision to participate. All previous analysis has led up to this part of the decision. The fundamental question to be addressed in this analysis is how life trajectories have led to the decision of running for local offices. The central link I aim to establish in this chapter can thus be made; how life trajectories and personal experiences are related to the ways in which BDP organizes and mobilizes these municipalities. Meanwhile this should also make visible BDP's policy of preparing, filtering and selecting for election lists which falls under the scope of following chapters.

The final dimension of analyzing life trajectories is through circling back to personal information and experience but specifically narrowed down to the urban experience. I look into all changes and adaptations both experienced and witnessed after moving into city or seeing displaced peasantry settle. This analysis particularly underlines events that have aggravated the condition of the displaced peasantry after arriving to the cities. I focus on testimonies of interaction between the displaced, party members and state officials. The purpose is to see how certain interactions have evolved into collective action and how these have translated into urban and civic demands.

In analyzing all dimensions I employ two basic fundamental approaches. Firstly, I make a distinction between reoccurring and singular narratives when comparing different interviews. I deem that reoccurring narratives are based on the meta-narrative of the movement or political climate at the time. Reoccurring narratives is not about uniqueness of the testimony but about the prevalence of certain concepts and subject positions each member assume by being part of the movement. Singular narratives on the other hand are more personal but still related to the movement; their diversity is due to the manifestation of the movement in multiple spheres. I approach singular narratives as diverse ramifications of Kurdish conflict and I deem that their multiplicity reveals how the base of BDP informs the movement in general to locate problems and generate solutions.

Secondly, I distinguished the trajectories in terms divergent or convergent paths of political participation. I use convergent and divergent to describe how the informants situate themselves as getting closer or farther away from their point of origin. Convergent paths are a person's inclusion into movement due to voluntary or structural consequences in their surroundings. These paths indicate that a person was almost "born" into the conflict and the dominating presence of the movement. Divergent paths are a person's inclusion into the movement through making a rational decision to challenge mainstream politics and status quo after experiencing a dramatic event. These paths testify to moments where non-resistant personalities chose to divert from their previous political choices. Testimonies with convergent paths tend to have reoccurring narratives revolving around description of political climate and singular narrative of political repression and persecution due to being part of the movement.

Divergent trajectories are usually marked with singular narratives and clear cut explanations behind motivating factors and reasons. These two categories are related to how interviewees portrayed their motivations. Within convergent paths, reasons and motivation for participation are self-evident, omnipresent and needs no other material explanation. I find these paths to be less revealing and harder to validate in terms of relating motivation with material relations. However divergent paths narrate more on how motivation has developed through complementary clusters of experiencing the conflict. The variance in these paths reveals more subtle issues and addresses more intricate problems that arose due to the conflict.

Addressing the Research Questions in the Following Chapters

The third chapter addresses two of the research questions raised during the fieldwork: (i) what are the life trajectories of BDP's elected local actors – mainly municipal councilors – that lead to their mobilization of municipalities and (ii) how were they nominated, how did municipal councilors organize during the elections and how do they still continue organizing? The data is analyzed and the emphasis of certain excerpts and events are made in accord with ethnographic observations. The extent to which personal experience can motivate towards political participation and how personal histories can be a reason for nomination and election is also analyzed in this chapter.

The fourth chapter addresses the last research question: what are their experiences as municipal councilors of BDP (and Kurdish activists within the immersed circle) and how are they mobilizing municipalities? Mostly referring to findings through interviews and ethnographic observations, certain aspects are

validated through interviews with municipal personnel, statistics and other research. Especially to address the concern over whether motivation or material interest can be virtually available to an observer or researcher, I resort to ethnographic observations in order to triangulate claims and truth.

CHAPTER III

LIFE TRAJECTORIES AND THE PATH TO ELECTION

The stallion can neigh thanks to the ox
plowing the field.⁴¹

All grass becomes green at the tip of its
root.⁴²

Oh what have we done?
What has befallen is what we have done.
Is it not shame or disgrace?
For what this cause of ours was?⁴³

You may be a tribe, but we are a
confederation of tribes.⁴⁴

This chapter explores the cause of BDP's local actors motivating them to organize at the local level and get involved in local politics. It addresses how local politics became central for actors in Kurdish movements looking into their life trajectories. It analyzes the initial formulation of their cause, how pre-1980 coup politics have affected their political orientations, how the conflict with the start of guerilla warfare was experienced, what happened at their urban localities during arrival of the displaced peasantry. Finally, it links these experiences with motivation to participate in local politics and get elected through their own narratives.

The interview excerpts laid out and analyzed in this chapter come from two of the research questions I raised during the fieldwork: (i) what are the life trajectories

⁴¹ A Kurdish Proverb.

⁴² A Kurdish proverb.

⁴³ The beginning verse of Şivan Perwer's song that strongly criticizes PKK and Öcalan, which made him politically ostracized.

⁴⁴ I heard this from a BDP official when he was telling how tribes they "warned" to give up a conflict.

of BDP's elected local actors – mainly municipal councilors – that lead to their mobilization of municipalities and (ii) how were they nominated, how did municipal councilors organize during the elections and how do they still continue organizing.

The argument of this chapter is that the events that have led individuals to participate in local politics in Diyarbakir and Van through Kurdish movement reveal complex causalities that transcend the reasons of increased channels of participation, suppression of Kurdish identity or political and economic gains through local offices. By all means, these reasons are also present and superficially observable. However the narratives of these actors on their life trajectories show that common grievances developed. These grievances are a result of rapid urbanization and the conflict. The critiques of state formation, development and modernization formed by personal experience and community organizing intersecting the common grievances and personal experiences have been central to motivate towards participation in local politics. At its core, Kurdish actors began contemplating local offices as political sites where they would steer their experience of modernity. As Tilly argues (2004: 12-14), these actors are political entrepreneurs, who assert popular sovereignty through their program (Democratic Autonomy), identity (Kurdish) and standing (their cause). And in parallel to Tilly's arguments, I assert that through their engagement with local politics Kurdish actors have devised their cause as the establishment of local popular sovereignty over collective consumption which determines local political and urban trajectories.

Beginning from the End: the Cause and Geography

Each social movement underlines a cause that defines the reasons for collective action. For political science, these reasons bear historical, sociological and political importance and are understood as contextual reasons. As such the focus is to study “how ideas, individuals, events and organizations are linked to each other in broader processes of collective action, with some continuity over time” (Della Porta and Diani 2006: 5). In the case of Kurdish conflict, the reasons of collective action have been publicly asserted by Kurdish actors as the expression of conflict addressed along the lines of an armed rebellion which has been the result of the conflict; thus with legitimate means.⁴⁵ This has been my initial finding among the interviewees as well:

We struggle for the urban life of a suppressed nation (*ezilmiş halk*). Just like the ones who are fighting for liberation on the mountains, we are the political and municipal side of this fight. (No. 1, Van, July 26, 2011)

You may not believe in a *cause* but you don't cause harm. That's my motto. And that's what PKK tells people. You don't have to love it. But you also shouldn't cause harm. You may not be active but at least your statements must not do harm. (No. 2, Van, July 29, 2011)

Seeing that I had been getting very similar answers for this question on the cause and legitimacy claims, I stopped asking it after couple of interviews. Mainly the answers were not revealing of the reasons leading up to the formulation of motivation for participation. I wanted to delve more into causal events instead of propagated ideals in circulation. These statements reflected a common discourse for anyone linked with Kurdish movement. In order to understand how local became important, I began putting more emphasis on geography and urban localities. I started seeing Diyarbakir

⁴⁵ PKK'lılara Sarılmak Suç Değil [Hugging PKK militants is not a crime]. Retrieved August 24, 2012 from www.cnnturk.com/2012/turkiye/08/23/tugluk.pkkilalara.sarilmak.suc.degil/673957.0/index.html.

and Van as geographies central for larger territories and ethnography allowed to see the relationship of these geographies in producing activist bases.

Thus, I began my interviews by asking their hometowns. This way I had the opportunity to boost informant motivation through informed questions about geography and political action. Knowing how historical regional interdependence existed helped to make better sense of motivating factors for political participation. In this way, the points of origin of the councilors in Diyarbakir and Van revealed social and cultural hinterland to a great extent and the importance of the geography. In many trajectories, I have discovered that the social and cultural domination of Diyarbakir and Van translated into making decisions of migration and adaptation to urban political economy. While making these decisions, these two cities are imagined as center of a larger geographically coherent territory.

The hometowns of nine councilors I have interviewed in Diyarbakir are various rural districts of Diyarbakir, Bingöl and Mardin. The decision to move to the city center of Diyarbakir from rural districts of Bingöl and Mardin instead of the city centers of the respective provinces is an important finding. The immigration pattern connects rural zones transcending Diyarbakir provincial area. Interestingly, councilors from the rural districts of Bingöl and Mardin had been commuting to Diyarbakir before their villages were forcibly evacuated. This reveals that the fact that Diyarbakir received the displaced peasantry more than its neighboring provinces is also related to previous immigration patterns. Diyarbakir is not industrialized and jobs are scarce; economically speaking moving to Diyarbakir is not the best option. This leads me to conclude that Diyarbakir is socially and culturally appealing and geographically closest option for many who chose to settle in the city in the last decades.

Most of the displaced peasantry came to Van from the southern districts and their neighboring province Hakkari. In parallel, sixteen councilors I have interviewed are from southern rural districts of Van, Hakkari and rural districts of Şırnak, Muş, Bitlis and Ağrı. These findings are not surprising. Everyone, displaced/immigrant or not, in these districts is dependent on Van for numerous reasons. Most of the state investment asymmetrically went to Van city center in comparison to provinces around it; such as the airport, the university and the railroad. Meanwhile university graduates from the peripheral districts and cities began settling in the city and getting government jobs, especially in teaching. This led to the emergence of the middle class who witnessed the conflict in the 1990s and with sympathy towards Kurdish movement. All these factors gave rise to Van as a cultural and social center for its surroundings.

The rise in the social and cultural life in Van is challenging the dominance of Diyarbakir-based politics of the movement in the Region. The centralist tendencies of the movement can be discerned through verbal discontent among activists. An İHD activist in Van told me how he put his foot down:

I told them, you invite us to Diyarbakır even when one of your chickens die. I swear I will never go to Diyarbakır in the middle of the summer for the regional convention. Last year we went there in the middle of those scorching days. This time I insisted on gathering in Hakkari. Branches in Hakkari and Bitlis also supported me and we organized the convention in Hakkari. (No. 3, Van, August 2010)

Activists in the Region have a curious link to Diyarbakir and activists in Van do not like it. Diyarbakir is the only metropolitan municipality administered by BDP and also for three consecutive terms. This inevitably situates Diyarbakir as the pioneer of BDP's practices in local politics. It is also a center for good examples for municipal work and BDP's local governments' branch in each city ensures that localities follow BDP's principles set by the experience in Diyarbakir. Hegemony of Diyarbakir's

presence is unmatched in this sense; the cadres that make up local governments' branch are appointed from Diyarbakir. I asked councilors in Van about their relation to the branch, and mostly I had answers that rarely defined anything. But one councilor presented his relation and critique of the branch:

Q: How are your relations with local governor branch of the party? Do you consult them?

A: No, I don't.

Q: Do they ever make contributions to your works, do they offer criticism?

A: They are top-down outlanders (*dışarıdan tepeden gelen*). They are not from Van. They don't know about the mechanisms in Van. Actually they know nothing about Iğdır, Hakkari or Doğu Beyazıt. They are not from Serhad (*Van and the region around*). They came from Amed (*Diyarbakir*). They try to fix things in their own way. One day in Iğdır, one day in Hakkari, one day in Doğu Beyazıt... I personally find local governor branch insufficient.

Q: Do you oppose the idea about appointing some people from Diyarbakır to Van?

A: Well, firstly I'm opposed to sending somebody from Diyarbakır to Van. Actually I'm opposed to local governor branch of the party. I think local governor branches of the party must be active in a way that, I mean people in the party who are educated and conscious must be in local governor branches. When something works, people may gossip and since local governor branch doesn't know about Van, they come and interfere. Formerly technical works were operated by the mayor. Zoning is still operated under mayor. But local governor branch came and they divided these departments to among the assistant mayors. And these people cannot carry out these duties successfully now. I mean the problem stems from there. (No. 4, Van, July 29, 2011)

Alongside his rationalized objection on the grounds that appointed party members from outside lack local knowledge, there is also a growing feeling in Van that the city now has the potential and the capacity to carry out BDP's principles in local politics without outside intervention. Through this criticism, it is understood that the authority vested in the branch is prone to local influences that may impair making an informed decision. Another issue about the mode of intervention is that the branch is taking the municipality of Diyarbakir as a template; thus reassigning more roles to assistants. But the councilor believes that this is an ill decision because the assisting mayors are already encumbered with a heavy load. Overall, the point is that in the

general scheme of BDP local politics, Diyarbakir's social and cultural hegemony trumps that of Van but actors in Van are critical when this hegemony is actually practiced because it leads to centralist interventions.

In the rest of the chapter, through forming a narrative of complementing life stories, I show that the cause is more about modernizing, urbanizing and civilizing of the *suppressed nation* and its *ad hoc legitimacy*. For the conclusion, I look into how councilors got elected to illuminate the party's politics of nomination and election.

Before the 1980 Coup, PKK, the Conflict and the Forced Displacement

The founders of HEP were members of SHP in the parliament. HEP became the sole political tradition that demanded end to the armed conflict and defended rights for Kurds in Turkey. The compelling questions are how a certain line of political tradition maintained its electoral base and why it was the sole political movement that defended rights for Kurds in Turkey within electoral politics. I follow life trajectories of councilors who lived through the period before the 1980 Coup, PKK, the Conflict and the Forced Displacement to tackle this question in terms of local politics.

The following statements are from three different interviews. They are explanatory in terms of situating leftist politics, nationalist sentiments, education and imagining geographies of resistance.

I went to high school in Diyarbakir. Back then, leftist students used to go to Diyarbakir and Van because we didn't have a high school in our towns. I preferred to go to Diyarbakir that time. I have been familiar with politics since 1973. We were at high school back then, there was still DDKO. Until 1978-80 there was a movement called Ala Rızgari. Of course other Kurdish movements in Turkey were ended by the fascism of September 12, so the only locus of power was PKK in 1984. With PKK's move in 1984 we started

to feel sympathy towards the movement. We supported it as a patriot (*yurtsever*). (No. 5, Van, July 18, 2011)

It was before 1980. We had a radio, actually it was not ours but our neighbors'. He was singing at 2 o'clock at "Yerevan Radio." I used to always listen to him no matter where I was. There weren't any tape cassettes at those times, we had radio. Then his tape cassettes come out on the market. I bought a cassette player. Soldiers came to our village. I went to hide all cassettes in the middle of dried cow dump (*tezek*). And after that I couldn't remember where I put them with such haste. They all stood there. People should talk of themselves as who they are. It would have been different for me if I had come and studied in city. Thanks to Şivan Perwer, I mean my movement began with Şivan Perwer. People say now Şivan Perwer is a little (off the track) ... But I still cannot get him out of my mind. (No. 6, Van, August 2, 2011)

With the party... My family members were already patriots (*yurtsever*). And in Başkale⁴⁶ when I was young, there were some ideological things, there was DDKO. So I began to learn about Kurdish movement. (No. 7, Van, August 2, 2011)

The first trajectory describes how political orientation motivated towards a place for education. DDKO had been the most widespread organization in the Region that lasted between 1969 and 1971. It is considered as the first socialist and Kurdish based organization in Turkey. The ability of the organization to fan out to rural districts in the Region and encourage youth to continue education in cities where high schools were present reveals how Kurdish Leftism developed through intellectual endeavor. In this context, *yurtsever* is being used to define an identity born out of this endeavor. But in other cases it is used to refer to self-awareness of Kurdish identity and support for all causes that seek to address historical grievances of Kurdish people.

The second trajectory relates to how cultural circulation produced national sentiment. "Şivan" means pastor in Kurdish and his musical work is mostly a compilation of very old songs and poems which are pastoral and epic. His music represents the epic awakening of a pastoral and repressed nation. Perwer's stentorian

⁴⁶ Başkale is a district of Van, on the border with Iran.

voice and sentimental tones made him the most influential Kurdish artist but his criticism of the movement in the last years led him to be politically ostracized. But even the most devout supporters of the movement cannot stop indulging themselves in his music. In contrast with the previous trajectory, the councilor hints the fact that reasons and factors that cultivate sympathy towards the movement differs depending on education and where a person is raised. The underlying assumptions are that peasants are less prone to political action than city dwellers and education is an important factor in making informed political decisions. I believe these assumptions are related to intellectual nature of Kurdish Leftism and to imagining geographies of resistance. The following statement from the same interview provides a better explanation:

My own family and siblings also believed in this cause. That's why half of our village voted for BDP. It is a high turnout. We took thirty four more votes from AKP. I, in that way, I mean, I was telling elderly, my father called me crazy. He said "How can you be opposed to the state?" It is not opposing to the state, you are a human being, and you have to defend your rights! If you don't defend your rights, if somebody insults you and you don't respond, if you accept the insult it is really a deficiency for you as a human being. It is a deficiency in consciousness, deficiency in conviction, deficiency in everything. That's how I perceive. I told it so over and over, and somebody saw certain realities. (No. 8, Van, August 2, 2011)

In the history of the conflict and in its self-representations, in spite of the rural undertones of the guerrilla warfare, rural communities have not been depicted as actively resisting geographies. Within this picture, the displaced peasantry was the victim and began organizing after arriving to cities. Councilors who actually experienced displacement indeed made clear that their political motivation was either present before displacement or that there was a collective resistance against displacement.⁴⁷ In parallel, the father as the patriarchal rural figure and the rebellious son in this example actually diverge from the picture because the son was successful

⁴⁷ Please refer to Interview No. 19, 20.

in changing the political views of the opinionated and obedient father. According to his account, even though the self-image of the councilor is created through geographies of resistance; his political struggle actually transformed a locality that is not imagined as a resisting geography. I revisit underlying factors of these inconsistencies in detail while analyzing the effect of witnessing and retelling.

Just as cultural circulation has been effective in creating conditions of participation in the movement, the presence of Kurdish identity also cultivated affinity towards the movement. This affinity alone did not evolve into political action until encountering the movement in urban localities.⁴⁸ Following statements are from councilors with rural backgrounds and are examples of how the affinity has been present before moving to the city.

Before 1980, even before 1970 there was KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) in Iraq. We had relations with them. They would come and go by. But of course we didn't do anything illegal. But we had relations. (No. 9, Van, July 13, 2011)

Nobody in our family was connected to the party. I mean they would vote for HADEP and DEHAP. That is, there was Kurdish nationalism in our family. It was ingrained to us. But none of us was in an active position. (No. 10, Van, July 27, 2011)

It must be noted that Kurdish identity has been a factor of mobilization before the conflict (Natali 2005, Entessar 1992). Mehdi Zana, a local tailor who was an independent candidate became the mayor in 1977 local elections in Diyarbakir. His term lasted until the 1980 coup and he was later imprisoned for eleven years. I believe the political climate that led to his election is compelling to address in order to tackle the question on how local politics became central for Kurdish actors in the Region. His election may bear clues about the background of local politics in

⁴⁸ This should be more apparent in between lines in the following excerpts throughout the chapter, please refer to Interview No. 18, 21, 22.

Diyarbakir. When a councilor brought up Mehdi Zana during the interview I decided to follow it up:

I'm part of this movement since I know myself. I worked for Mehdi Zana's campaign at that period. I don't know him personally but I believed that he should win. (No. 11, Diyarbakir, February 10, 2012)

The comment about Zana's election campaign bore clues about the historical dynamics of local politics in Diyarbakir. Dorronsorro and Watts' article (2009) makes a cogent analysis of the period. They argue that Zana's success rested firstly on the inability of "the mainstream political parties to mobilize as many voters in the Kurdish-majority provinces of the southeast as they had in the past" and secondly on "Zana's particular brand of social capital and flexible political links to the Kurdistan movement [which] put him in a strong position to create an election coalition outside the notables or mainstream parties" (Dorronsorro and Watts 2009: 474). Firstly, the fact that an independent candidate could organize a grassroots election campaign where mainstream political parties could not reveal that fundamentally mainstream parties lacked the agenda to appease voters in Diyarbakir. I look into what was missing through the interviews later on when I analyze their critiques of the state and political system. And secondly, Zana's links with the Kurdistan movement which was at the intersection of DDKO and TİP (Workers' Party of Turkey) shows Kurdish local politics in Diyarbakir contained elements of Leftist organizing. Both of these factors in fact show how a political party that both appeases demands of the locals and also have leftist inclinations could have filled the space in local politics before the 1980s. And another important factor in local politics when Zana was running for elections was that:

Complaints ranged from lack of health, educational, electric, water, and sewage services to problems with crime and violence, including blood feuds and police brutality. Student unrest among high school and university students was acute. Dissatisfaction was often directed against the

municipality; Yeni Yurt newspaper reported in September 1977, for instance, that local people protested the mayor's years of failure to improve the sewage system, something critics argued had contributed to the spread of diseases such as cholera (Dorransorro and Watts 2009: 469).

When the movement began mobilizing the municipalities in 1999, all of these problems existed both in Diyarbakir and Van. These cities witnessed severe violence and persecution in the long decades of the 80s and 90s due to the conflict when local politics became an issue of less importance. And the rapid urbanization resulting from the displaced peasantry did not help to improve urban conditions. Given these events and the two decades delay in municipal services, contemporary Kurdish movement as the single movement that rose out of the lagging conditions from the 1970s was able to organize local politics its political tradition which situated itself in a distance from mainstream political parties and centered on leftist tradition.

Many of my acquaintances and informants that were raised during the conflict only participated within the post-1980 Kurdish movement. There was little mention of political struggles and organizations of the earlier years; physically and discursively. The interviewees whom mentioned these struggles underlined that participants and sympathizers of other political struggles continued their political aspirations under the umbrella of Kurdish movement. The narrative of the councilor who became a sympathizer of the movement after the 1980 coup because of the political dynamics tells how certain activists chose to continue organizing:

My father was politically active. He supported KUK (Kurdistan National Liberationists). They organized UDG (National Democratic Union of Forces). After this movement started, they turned away. Everybody did. Then these organizations were dissolved. The remaining is what we call 'tırşikçi.'"⁴⁹ (No. 12, Van, July 30, 2011)

⁴⁹ "Tırşikçi" is the derogatory remark used to describe other Kurdish political factions who have not joined the resistance of PKK, starting from the experience at the notorious Diyarbakir prison in the 1980s. Tırşik is a traditional dish of Diyarbakir. Tırşikçi (eater, seller or consumer of tırşik) was coined for Kurdish factions who supposedly ate tırşik at the prison when PKK militants were holding a hunger strike.

The forced displacement of the 1990s is definitely not the first time the region witnessed the forced population mobility. I want to conclude this subsection with two accounts that reveal one of the policies of the incipient Turkish state to deal with Kurdish dissent: forced relocation. The first account is about Kurdish notables from rural Van who joined their forces to establish the Republic of Ararat but was defeated in 1930. The rebellion was crushed wiping out most of Kurdish notables and massacres of the state forces are still remembered. The second account is about Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925 that began in Elazığ but soon spread to Diyarbakir and Bingöl. Authors who studied the history of these rebellions usually agree on their nationalist motivations (Bozarslan 2005; Alkom 1998).

When Abubekir and Lezgin Aga's riot broke out my grandfather was also an Imam. The state was dispersing them. He was able to choose wherever he wanted. He wanted to go to our village before the death of Atatürk. Since that we have been living in our village. (No. 13, Van, July 13, 2011)

We got familiar with politics early. Our tribe faced cruelty during Sheikh Said rebellion. We immigrated to our current village. Armenians had left the village after massacre. I mean it was empty. That's why there has been always an inclination to politics. Elderly, for example, feel belonging to our old village. But we feel belonging to our new village. Our village was so mixed. There were Armenian converts and people from Kulp and Hani.⁵⁰ (No. 14, Diyarbakir, March 7, 2012)

There is a fundamental distinction between forced relocation and forced displacement. When the state forced to relocate Kurdish peasants for security reasons, the purpose was to scatter the population but again in rural areas. This is referred as scorched-earth policy (Jongerden 2005: 41). The intervention of the state aimed at ensuring that dissidence would not continue and peasant would resettle. There was a concern for substance of the population and their livelihoods. But forced displacement and burning of the villages have a completely different purpose. The strategy of the state was to deprive guerrillas of resources and logistics and yet there

⁵⁰ Kulp and Hani are districts of Diyarbakir province.

was not a concern for the population and their livelihoods. Once Turkish Armed Forces decided to depopulate a region or a village, there was no follow up of the fate of the people being displaced. This inevitably shifted the dominant mode of production and organization from rural areas to rapid urbanization.

Seeing, Witnessing and Experience

BDP councilors attributed most of the problems related to municipal service delivery and other urban and social issues in Van and Diyarbakir to vast flock of displaced peasantry. This raises two compelling questions: why the urban problems of the displaced became the imminent concern of Kurdish actors and why these actors began mobilizing or seeing the mobilization of local politics to address these concerns. I dwell on the answers to the accounts and the interview questions regarding how the informants saw, witnessed or experienced the displacement side of the conflict.

Most of the councilors arrived to these cities before the conflict yet some of them continued to commute to their villages. The informants being observers and/or affected by the turbulent event were able to narrate how urban environment reshaped certain lifestyles, forged a new political economy and why they felt necessary to mobilize collectively to mitigate the effects. In this subsection, I follow the politicizing effect of the forced displacement.

I categorize the narratives into three groups; seeing, witnessing and experience. Some informants retold how they saw the conditions of the displaced in the cities and how they were informed by first-hand witnesses and affected by the events: seeing. Few others recounted how they witnessed the villages being

depopulated and burnt: witnessing. And a couple of them had an actual experience of being forcibly displaced: experience. The analysis brings forth in what ways informants regarded the events unjust and decided to act upon it.

When an informant told me that he worked as a driver on the roads of Muş, Hakkari and Van I asked what he saw throughout his travels in the 1990s during the peak of the conflict. His answer bears many issues regarding the relation between seeing and affect.

Too much, how can I tell you! Some things just come to my mind; I wish I had never seen them. Some people tell us “What do you want?” of course since they didn’t see anything, I mean maybe they did but it just doesn’t suit their interest. So you ask “what did you see?” I saw really unimaginable things at those times. I saw that because of migration, how wealthy people, there were so many people like that, had 30-40 guests. They were all devastated. I have seen so much misery. Not mine but by seeing other peoples’, and if you have a conscience it really affects you deeply. (No. 15, Van, August 2, 2011)

The answer lacks a full graphic account of what is actually seen and stresses the uneasiness of seeing such occurrences. However the informant quickly establishes a relationship between what he saw and its effects. Especially putting an emphasis on the fact that he did not suffer from the events, he asserts that a person with a conscience is deeply affected by seeing the misery of other people. The most intricate issue raised by the informant is his thoughts on why the demands of the movement are rebuffed by certain other parties. He underscores that other parties cannot relate to their demands either because they have not seen (or retold) about the events or that it does not suit their material interests. I have encountered this logic on other interviews as well. The argument goes that unless there is a vested material interest, many people regard that people with conscience can relate to the conditions of Kurds.

When I asked a councilor, who has been a member of the party since the early 1990s about the conditions of poor and displaced in Sur, I received a more graphic account of the immediate conditions of the peasants following displacement:

People, who lost their houses, animals everything, sold their animals for a low price and came to these streets. So many people, I was again a party official at that time, I would visit streets and houses. Back then there was no space in the city. People were living in houses on the top of each other. Those people would go to bring something to sell from the whole sale vegetables market with so much suffering by manual labor on top of vehicles. Believe me, those people suffered a lot. They would come to us and cry. They would say “I had that much property but I came here and started to beg. They have burnt our village. We came to this city with twelve family members what can I do from now on?” Sometimes while visiting streets, believe me we wept not being able to contain ourselves. Because when we saw those people like that, as victims, hungry, devastated... there are still so many people in Sur who are hungry. Some men go and make breads in stone ovens (*tandır*) to supply income for their children. Most of them don’t even have that opportunity. To buy flour, make dough and sell it for their children... Some people just don’t have the opportunity. After they settled down here, some went to the west and faced discrimination like “You came from the Southeast, you are a terrorist. Terrorists should give you a job”... There were people in these circumstances. Those people suffered a lot. (No. 16, Diyarbakir, February 10, 2012)

Unlike the previous account where what was seen has been the result of encountering, this informant was already politically engaged with the movement when peasants began arriving to cities. As the informant already established his previous political engagement, his narrative conveyed more on the emotional effect when describing what he witnessed. The details are clearer as to how the displacement resulted in abrupt impoverishment and how unskilled peasants entered an informal economy to sustain minimum livelihood. The fact that this account lacks any mention of unskilled industrial labor accommodated in Diyarbakir is another indicator that industrial jobs were scarce for the arriving displaced. The unskilled laborers who sought jobs in the industrialized West were being stigmatized for what ethnic background marked for Westernized Turks. The study of Saraçoğlu shows how middle class in Izmir, an industrialized city in the west of Turkey, viewed

Kurdish settlers and how they continued to exclude Kurds not because of mere ethnic difference but because Kurds continued to cling on to Kurdishness which marked “separatism” and other non-urbane traits (2011: 23). Both this account and Saraçoğlu’s study point out that there have been sociological exclusions limiting Kurdish immigrants’ entry into urban political economy.

Why was there literally no state, social or welfare, involvement to mitigate the dire conditions of its own citizens? Could it be another repressive measure with security incentives? Or could it be the roll-back of the welfare apparatus? The testimony of an informant who is retired from Ministry of Public Works reveals that both are relevant:

Q: You were working in the Ministry of Public Works at that time. Has the Ministry been doing something about the displacement?

A: No, they weren’t.

Q: So what was the Ministry doing in that period?

A: We demanded renovation of burned villages and reconstruction of these villages for people to live in there instead of building “köy-kent” (*village-town*). That was the only way so that people could go back there and live there comfortably, that was what I said so. For example; you build a “köy-kent” but people’s village is thirty km off from there, how can they commute? There is neither public transportation nor vehicles. In that sense this project of “köy-kent” is meaningless. It is not appropriate for our people’s way of living. Their sources of income are agriculture and animal breeding. This “köy-kent” logic I think was to gather people at one location under the domination of an “aga” or security forces.

Q: So you were organizing as people because the state didn’t have a strategy?

A: Of course. When I retired there was GÖÇ-DER (Association of Culture and Social Solidarity with Migrants). I wanted to take place in that organization and work there because I care.

Q: How did you help in sense of solidarity?

A: To make them support each other, for examples about their problems like food and clothing. To submit petition to relevant institutions, seek their rights and find them free legal advice. (No. 17, Van, July 18, 2011)

This testimony is versatile to summarize the involvement of the state and the sorts of activism that developed through seeing the displacement. The limited state involvement with the conditions of the displaced has two faces: state ministries lacked a sustainable plan and only one of the governments in the 1990s implemented

a single project that did not continue. Jongerden (2009: 6-7) argues that the project did not continue because other state institutions opposed and the displaced villagers did not welcome the prospect. In terms of national politics, especially during the 1990s Turkey witnessed ten governments and five different prime ministers making one project which was based on a single person's initiative. I argue with Jongerden and the informant that the project's purpose was to sustain rural economy while depriving logistics for guerrilla activity. The demands of the movement, on the other hand, asked for full return and direct state involvement in rebuilding rural communities. But this demand has never been realized. So in the face of immediacy of the problem, community activists organized other means of solidarity for the displaced. Mobilizing legal advocacy for the displaced and material aids brought together NGO activists with sympathy towards the movement and Kurdish peasants. This allowed the movement to organize the grassroots and see their grievances better. So the most significant consequence or politicizing effect of seeing was bringing together activists and grassroots.

An informant counted that he witnessed burnt villages during his military service. He said he actually did not participate or see them being burnt but saw rubbles and heard from other soldiers who had attended an operation in person. This was in 1989 and later the same informant decided to leave his district Lice in 1993 after military laid a siege on the town resulting in thirty six deaths. His statement on how his political motivation changed after realizing state brutality and impunity shows the politicizing effect of witnessing:

How could a state treat its people like that? This state is responsible for the protection of life and property! I didn't know that until that very moment. After that I made a decision; from now on I will endure and follow this struggle with my people wherever they go. And while following this struggle I will not aim at destroying, I shall attempt to change the present legislation in a more democratic way, I said. (No. 18, Diyarbakir, February 9, 2012)

What separates this statement from previous ones that define politicizing effect is that the informant happened to witness the event while being part of a state institution tyrannizing Kurds. Thus the motivation seems to center on obtaining necessary efficacy to change the wrongdoings from within. I regard these comments to be retrospectively formulated and politically corrected during the interview. The informant's core motivation was in fact seeking justice and ending impunity. He wanted to convey that his witnessing of certain events made him diverge from his previous path. This is also true for other trajectories where local actors have a background in human rights activism. The politicizing effect of witnessing brings out a motivation towards activism in the field of human rights.

Lastly, I handle testimonies on the experience of forced displacement as a motivating factor for participation in local politics. The policy of the state forced the peasantry to take up arms and participate in joint operations with the military as paramilitaries⁵¹ or to leave. Thus it was actually this policy that kindled politicization and begot resistance.⁵² The two testimonies below are from Diyarbakir and have significant similarities:

The whole village was burned. I was there when the village was set on fire. We would go to village during vacations. We were in Diyarbakır in winter and in village in summer. Paramilitarism (*koruculuk*) was imposed on the village. We didn't accept and peasants didn't leave the village after it was

⁵¹ Some authors refer to paramilitary forces as "Village Guards" (for example, Van Bruinessen 1996, Watts 2009, Jongerden 2005, Gunter 2000, Göçek 2008, Ruys 2008, Smith 2005) which is verbatim translation of the term (*Köy Korucusu*) coined by Turkey. I intentionally use the term paramilitary for several reasons. They have no status within the hierarchy of the military which they are not an official part. Village Guard is a term that implies taking arms to protect one's village that serves to underpin arguments of the state. The concept of paramilitary is also used in Latin American studies. The term Village Guard implies uniqueness, but use of paramilitary to describe the event situates the practice within world politics.

⁵² Leaving was the first step of resistance for many who rejected to take up arms. Yet in some cases, the option to take up arms and become paramilitary forces has not been offered. Those who did take up arms had been declared as traitors in the 1990s, but the policy of the movement and PKK's attitude towards them changed in the 2000s. The condition of the paramilitaries is intricate, hard to investigate thus under researched. I believe that this research field would not likely to be available even with the end of the conflict.

burned. They build tents but they returned. They resisted. Tribal relations had a positive effect in resisting. Elderly would talk to people to convince them. Three tribes united and resisted together. They were all Zaza villages. (No. 19, Diyarbakir, March 7, 2012)

We had hard times in 1990s. We had a vineyard in the village. Our village was empty for nine years. Our house was set on fire in 1993. Our vineyard was set on fire. We pleaded to ECHR. We won the lawsuit. Is it different now? No. But the repression was more severe at those times. Now there is still repression. And it is more subtle and systematic. We immigrated because of infertile field; it was hard to earn a living. We used to be in village in summers and used to go to Diyarbakir in winters. And it was going to be hard for children's education. (No. 20, Diyarbakir, March 7, 2012)

Both cases pertain to rural communities in Bingöl and reveal that certain economic and social incentives have been a driving factor for commuting. It seems that prior to forced displacement, their families were in between of immigrating to the city. So the force factor induced resistance and in the first statement community elders organized collective resistance. Both of these statements belong to women informants and their life trajectories showed that economic hardship has not been a central concern but rather that their motivation for political action was the repression and persecution and wanting to be part of women's organizing. And the politicizing effect of experience is first resistance and then spearheading grassroots mobilization.

I listened to one of the most gripping testimonies in Van during an interview with a councilor who told me that he arrived in Van in 1995 after his village was forcibly depopulated. I thought that the year of 1995 was quite late and I asked how they were able to withstand until then, he told:

We withstood until 1995 in this way; the whole village was forced to take up arms in May 1989. They said either you become paramilitary or... One or two people from each family and at last everyone who is of full age became paramilitaries. When they were "korucu" they would go to military operations with the state. They would keep the guard beneath the military outpost. The soldiers and paramilitaries were together in four positions in the village. In May 1995 soldiers left the village. When they left they said "You should go to this other village." We said "we won't go there. Our village is nicer with woods and prairie, it is cuter." They said "if you don't go there then go away from this village to that village and do your "korucu" duty there." We said

“we cannot leave our fields and houses and go that village. We’ll go somewhere else if we would ever go.” They said “then go anywhere, you cannot stay in your village anymore. We removed the military forces from here. If you stay in this village you’ll harbor and abet PKK.” We have gone to military operations with them with our guns we have searched mountains; we have been in battles together with them since 1989. We said “don’t you trust us?” They said “no, we don’t trust you. You go either to that village or to this one in which there are military forces. You cannot stay in this village.” So we went. We asked for cars. We took our civilian clothing and beds; we didn’t take everything with us. So we went away from the village. On the third day we had the news that our village was set on fire. They set it on fire spilling gasoline... There were elections in autumn of 1995. There was also elections heat. Political parties came. Ecevit came with Mrs. Raşan. Then I talked as spokesman of group. I talked to Mr. Ecevit. He said “My heart burns (*yüreği yanmak*). People, who did this to people like you, should pay for it. What is your crime?” I said openly “our crime is to be Kurdish.” Just because we are Kurdish... we don’t have any other crimes. What did we do? From March 1989 until July of 1995 we did our military service for second time with the state taking up guns. Still they didn’t trust us; they expelled us and depopulated our village. (No. 21, Van, July 18, 2011)

Paramilitary forces in the Region are a huge political and social problem and an intricate topic. Since 1990, one of the movement’s central demands is the disarmament of paramilitary forces (Bozarslan 1995, Barkey 1998). However the system is still intact and provides a meager income which has become indispensable for many village dwellers. The choice to become a paramilitary force is not essentially political and generalization of reasons is hard to make. Yet it was presented to rural communities as the only option for staying (Jongerden 2005). However, as in this narrative, when the conditions of military presence had changed the only compensation, the Armed Forces offered were forced relocation. So despite the fact that the community held their end of the bargain, they could not escape forced displacement after six years. This experience has swayed the informant that his misery is inexorably related to his ethnicity which is an unalterable existential fact. So in the last instance, the extremity of experiencing the conflict – not to mention the cultural persecution of Kurdish identity – was being Kurdish. However the reason for experiencing the conflict – which is being Kurdish in this case – is not

narrated as the politicizing reason; instead the interviewee explained how he made a rational choice:

After that day, politically... Well maybe you'd say "You are a peasant, peasants don't have much political thoughts." I say it you don't. My political outlook was like that; I was saying that for this conflict to end, for this shedding blood to stop and for our kids not to die I was going to work in whichever party seemed as salvation. Back then there was HADEP and I went there. I saw that HADEP was arguing "We want peace, democracy and humanity. The guerillas in mountains and the police and soldiers in city (*ova*) shouldn't die. I saw and heard that through whole my political life and I still believe in that. Now I'm a member of that party. I am still politically active there... When I first joined that party I saw the light there, this party will struggle, I said. If I were to see it in DSP (Democratic Left Party) when I met Ecevit, I would be a member of DSP. But I didn't see it on their program. (No. 22, Van, July 18, 2011)

In all my interviews being Kurdish has never been portrayed as a factor of politicization not even when it was explicitly stated that ethnicity was the reason for persecution. Whatever happened during the conflict years and however severe it was, the language of the movement among its local activists still holds onto its basic demands which dwells around democracy, human rights, civic equality and cultural recognition. And this testimony shows that even though being Kurdish is the extremity of experiencing the conflict, the outcome of this experience and its politicizing impact are demanding an end to the war. In the last instance, it is actually the devastating effects of the conflict that is the most acute experience.

In this subsection, I presented excerpts from the interviews which show that seeing, witnessing and experiencing the conflict and ensuing forced displacement was a motivating factor to participate in local politics. Yet, I do not suggest the conflict itself solely created conditions for activism and politicization. As the next subsection aims to underpin, the aftermath of forced displacement also had substantial effect.

The Aftermath of Forced Displacement: Collective Urbanization

After analyzing how basic demands of the movement and politicizing effect resulting from the conflict are related, it is necessary to look into the aftermath of the forced displacement: collective urbanization. In the previous subsection, the traces of changing livelihoods and life styles emerging from the transformation from rural to urban economy were present in between lines which were intertwined with seeing, witnessing and experiencing the conflict. In this subsection, I aim to further analyze how urbanization and hardships related to it were recurring themes in life trajectories and how these themes relate to motivation towards participation in local politics. I begin with singular narratives to reveal the wide spectrum of experiences. I analyze these narratives into two categories; first category is about new political economy in cities during transition from rural to urban economy, and second category is related to how socio-political experiences in other cities have motivated returning to the Region. I then continue with testimonies of collective action which are recurring narratives. This analysis illuminates the background of urban and civic demands of BDP.

The first category of narratives is about new political economy in cities showing the transition from rural to urban economy. The timeframe of the following narratives precedes the conflict:

In 1976 we immigrated to Diyarbakir because of economical reasons. I grew up in Bağlar district. We worked in the construction sector as a family. (No. 23, Diyarbakir, March 6, 2012)

Since all my maternal uncles were in Van my father came here. My mother is from Erüh originally but all of my grandfathers were in Van. We were in the village then we came to Van. They were selling cheese, sesame paste, jams and cucumbers for breakfast which are appealing to peasants. (No. 24, Van, July 29, 2011)

I studied in Van until high school. My father was a farmer then he became a salesman. After the military service I started work in constructions and production. I was the chairman of Briquettes Cooperative. I still assume the position.” (No. 25, Van, July 26, 2011)

After the military service we resided in Van because of some reasons perhaps economical and etc. After the 1980s we started trading. Personally I started with a restaurant. I opened a restaurant in bus station facility. For many years... Then we entered the construction sector in the city center. We bought lots and build some places as cooperatives. I make and sell houses with my partners. (No. 26, Van, July 11, 2011)

The two work branches that prevail during transition are small scale shop trade and construction. Small scale shop trade includes running grocery stores and restaurants, selling home appliances or other goods. There are examples where second generation is involved in small scale production and work as contractors. These economic preferences follow complete or partial departure from rural economy. This shows that commerce and construction sectors appealed more and were virtually available for the unskilled immigrants. On the other hand, these types of commercial activities can be considered as “first come first serve.” Relatively earlier arrivers to these cities were able to use their capital towards commercial activities that eventually yielded higher returns as cities grew. This has allowed them to get representation among professional organizations, chambers and cooperatives. So Diyarbakir and Van, as cities which appealed to Kurdish peasants in their peripheries, eventually allowed some of the immigrating Kurdish peasants to rise to level of local elites. This has led to a new urban political economy where middle and entrepreneurial classes constitute a stratum of the popular movement.

The following excerpts show the rising middle class stratum and their politicization in urban localities. The middle class residents, especially shop owners and state employees in Diyarbakir and Van have been part of acts of civil disobedience. These excerpts reveal that urbanization has also allowed these actors to

form cycles of protests related to their occupations and class positions in cities. The first excerpt is from a retired Imam, elected as a councilor in 2009:

I'm from Bingöl. I was born in 1941. I didn't study. Fifteen years after my military service a primary school was built in our village. I was educated in Arabic. I studied at a Medrese (*traditional religious school*). I studied at various places in Muş. Thanks to that education I took the exams and I got my diploma of secondary school. I studied in various villages; that's what "medrese" students do, they are travelers. I came to Diyarbakir in 1957. After the military service I became the Imam at a mosque. I got my competence as an Imam through taking the exams. I became an Imam of state. After working for 29 years I retired in 1995. I got 450 liras as a pension for my service. I would have taken more if I had worked for a widowed woman with seven kids. (No. 27, Diyarbakir, March 9, 2012)

This trajectory reveals that despite being illiterate in Turkish, through the alternative training of traditional religious schools the councilor was able to complete official courses to become a state employed Imam. Becoming an Imam through these schools is prestigious and leads to become a community opinion leader. In the recent years, independent Imams in the region began getting more public attention and they have been effective in organizing Friday prayers outside state-sponsored mosques which was one of the civil disobedience actions organized in 2011.⁵³ Prior to mass organizations of civil disobedience in 2011, depending on the local agenda there were sporadic and collective disobedience practices. The most common practice that still continues is shutting down shops. The following statement shows that this practice became a reason for criminal persecution especially in the 1990s:

In the 1990s, I sold home appliances. I've seen many assassinations and repression. I was forced to be taken to the court. I was accused after pulling shutters (*kepenk kapatma*) of my shop down. (No. 28, Diyarbakir, March 10, 2012)

⁵³ Seeing the important role of Imams trained outside the state institutions, the government is now employing a thousand traditionally trained Imams in the Region. These Imams will have provisional contracts and the government states that this will be a onetime application. For details; Diyanetten Mele Ataması [Directorate of Religious Affairs Appoints Traditionally educated Imams]. Retrieved June 25, 2012 from www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1091805&CategoryID=77.

The second category of trajectories is related to how socio-political experiences in other cities have motivated returning to the Region and to Diyarbakir and Van and participating in local politics. The reasons for immigrating in the first place are economic or political and the reasons for returning back to Region are about adaptation. Following statements show three examples of experience of immigrating twice:

I came to Van in 1993. It was just a desire. We were in Istanbul before. We couldn't make it in Istanbul so we came to Van. (No. 29, Van, August 4, 2011)

I was about to go bankrupt. I sold my business in the West. You know, people miss their home wherever they go. First I thought of going to Istanbul then I came to Van. I didn't establish a business in Van. That was the reason why I came. I didn't benefit from it for six years. My neighbors wouldn't come to visit me during the Eids, they wouldn't even salute me. (No. 30, Van, August 1, 2011)"

My father is a contractor. He got contractors from state's auctions. Then they stopped giving him contracts. They crossed a red line on his file (*dosyasına kırmızı çizgi çizdiler*). Before he was getting contracts in Muş and Bingöl. These were also reasons for his migration to Mersin. He went on working as a contractor in Mersin. We lived in there for eight years. Throughout this period there was still a desire to go back. Family members and elderly also wanted that. That was how my years passed between childhood and adolescence. Then we went back to Diyarbakir moved to a neighborhood in Yenişehir. It is a relatively elite neighborhood so repression is less felt there. Politically, when families like ours return they have such worries. I was working in my father's office in Mersin. He didn't have problems in auctions in Mersin. After 2005 he kept on getting auctions in Southeast. But since the last three years he cannot get auctions with his own file again. (No. 31, Diyarbakir, March 7, 2012)

The first statement shows that even though Van was not the first option for immigrating due to economic reasons but at some point it became attractive for this family. The second statement is parallel to the first but has multiple layers explaining the factors behind returning. In one of the previous accounts, an example was given about unskilled workers not getting jobs due to ethnicity. And in this statement, it is asserted that economic integration not necessarily created conditions of social

integration leading to make a decision to return. On the other hand, the third statement shows how even higher socio-economic standing is not immune to discrimination and deprivation.⁵⁴ All of these statements underpin that the decision of returning to cities in the Region arise due to failing to adapt economically, socially or politically to other cities in Turkey. This is an important indicator that urban environment of Diyarbakir and Van is considered a preferable social sphere. Thus, apart from being motivated to participate in local politics; certain actors' trajectories also reveal that running for offices in Diyarbakir and Van also became important for them.

Following the trajectories that reveal the examples of middle-class stratum being motivated to participate in local politics, I continue by looking into narratives of adapting to cities and the formation of urban identity. I present three examples of urbanizing one's self or collectively where I seek how an urban identity was being formed during the period of transition from rural to urban economy.

The first statement I want to analyze is about a self-made man. He was born as the eldest son in Van when his family had just immigrated to the city for economic purposes. While the family continued to breed animal in the outskirts of the city, the grandfather made a fortune because the city expanded towards the fields he bought when he immigrated. During the interview, the informant described in length how his family holds onto their rural identity despite being in the urban environment. Especially in terms of education, he was not financially supported and despite his protests most of his siblings did not get any education. The grandfather which was the patriarchal leader of the extended family abstained from sharing his fortune while

⁵⁴ An excerpt from Yüksel's study (2011: 445) shows how discrimination and persecution of business elite were severe during the 1990s: "Tansu Çiller announced that she had a list of Kurdish businessmen who helped the PKK. Who were they? Nobody knew. But all of a sudden, we all became suspects."

his father did not work. The statement below is his explanation of becoming who he is as an accountant:

For example I have worked in constructions, I have made plaster, I have laid briquettes, I worked as a dishwasher, I would work every summer. In third year of high school, I got into college. I admitted to Diyarbakir Community College, Department of Data Processing. I got in 1993 and at last I hit the shovel on the ground and I said "I made it to the university so I will never work in constructions again." I went to Diyarbakir for college the program was for two years. At that time it came to my mind that I would become an accountant, I was impressed by friends. I came to Van after graduation. We had lived in Van but I didn't know anybody, I mean I knew people who worked in constructions and as carries, I didn't know any shopkeepers. I came and visited the accountants... I said that I had finished studying and was looking for a job. Then I started to work in an accountant's office in July of 1995. (No. 32, Van, July 27, 2011)

The interview dwelled mostly on how he was able to get an education, make a living and become a part of city's urban middle class in terms of education and income.

This testimony should be considered as a unique example of self-made success. The important issue however regarding this interview is based on the resistance to adapt to urban economy that is prevalent. In the rest of the interview, the family is described as non-political but sympathetic to the movement because of Kurdish identity while patriarchal values and tribe loyalties continued to be practiced.

Families and family economies were affected significantly by the displacement and this had an impact in the adaptation to the city. The statement below delineates how an extended family dispersed after experiencing a military siege on their rural district:

Our extended family had sixty households. Fifty seven of them came here, three stayed. They stayed there because they couldn't find money to come. The situation was like that, I mean the family dispersed. Some of them settled down in here, some of them in Istanbul and Adana. Now, every one of them is in different places. Now, we came here and there are no jobs here. My wife was a teacher in carpet making courses; she was working in development foundation (*kalkınma vakfı*). They set the workshop in Lice on fire. After they burnt it they terminated their jobs. She got her compensation. We spent that money here. We made do with it. Then we opened a supermarket also here... There is something in our family; we like commune life. When someone is in

a difficulty the other give them all they have. We have such a commune life. For example, my brother had a house, my sisters, my brothers and my close relatives gave us all their saving. We gathered the money. Still we lacked some of the money so we took out a loan from a bank. We bought a house for my younger brother. The solidarity goes on. (No. 33, Diyarbakir, February 9, 2012)

This statement shows how solidarity networks based on family ties have been important to deal with the effects of abrupt uprooting despite the fact that extended familial links have been severed due to geographical distance after resettling. However not all networks have been weakened. Families continued to support each other and strive collectively against the difficulties. These collective efforts to counter the economic and social difficulties of moving to the cities are important indicator of the motivation to participate in local politics.

Solidarity predominantly revolved around political or economic mobilization of the displaced. Since forced displacement is the central political concern of the movement in cities. My aim was to learn more about solidarity action that led to political mobilization. The following excerpt provides an example by touching on issues such as urban political economy, cooperative economy, collective action, criminalization of urban poor, spatial accumulation of capital, retrenchment of welfare state and the forced displacement. It also bears colorful descriptions regarding spatial accumulation of capital, criminalization of the urban poor and retrenchment of the welfare state. The councilor highlights these as problems occurring in the urban setting and his motivation to participate is to encounter these negative effects:

They came and they didn't have jobs. What would people who immigrated from a village do, animal breeding, farming etc. And the state didn't have a policy like "Okay, I took you from your village you came to city now I'll give you a life style, a village, a house, a job." It is very difficult. Can you imagine that somebody will take your house, your job and everything and will say "There is nothing I can do, go do whatever you like."? This is really a dramatic event. It is really a difficult life style. Those people suffered a lot.

They were under very difficult conditions, they still are. What happened? They saw themselves in city; they put on ironed trousers and said “I am an urbanite, maybe I’ll get a mobile phone.” Well, it didn’t work out. What did they do? As a street vender, they sold things like socks. Municipal police chased him. His whole world crumbled. What can I do? There are no jobs, no crafts, there is nothing. What will that person do? So they gathered together, we came up with an idea. At those times lots were not much expensive in Van. In times of Mesut Öztürk a street was given to them; there were buffets. They got places. A main artery was opened, they got buffets temporarily. They learned about trade. Most of them don’t know Turkish. They earned a little money. I remember some of them had the carpet which their mother had made; some of them had a few gold coins. “We found the place lets buy here, it is not perfect but it’ll work” they said. 10-15 square meters of space for each shop... You must have seen and visited most of them. But now it is good for Van, people coming from Istanbul will first go there and visit. That’s an appealing place now. People did it, they owned property. They formed cooperatives. They gathered their little savings and bought big places. They bought places as big as 2-3 square meters. These are the places like this. They are not modern they lack infrastructure. They managed to do it. They learned about life and commerce. (No. 34, Van, July 11, 2012)

An important aspect related to the informant is that he was among the people who spearheaded organizing the aforementioned cooperative which is now known as Rus Pazari (The Russian Bazaar). Situated in the center of the city, Rus Pazari is both a tourist attraction and a grand bazaar for local needs. The informant had settled in the city a decade before the conflict and made himself a decent living out of commercial activity and construction business. Originally from Hakkari, he was in a position of witnessing when the displaced peasants arrived. First thing he noticed was their economic problems and adaptation issues which could not have been compensated by posing as an urban dweller. This is a clear cut statement about what makes an urbanite is not the ways in which someone consumes but the ways in which someone participates in the urban production and commercial activities. Since the newcomers lacked any skills or education that was useful in the city, just like the narratives on transition from rural to urban economy, the most plausible option was opening up shops. But because individually people lacked sufficient capital to open up a decent business, he helped organize a cooperative economy to jumpstart. In the interview,

he also states that the dominant reason behind his nomination for councillorship was his past in community organizing in commercial matters:

Where I reside and work, there are 7-8 cooperatives and more than thousand shops. They are influential in my election. I must have introduced myself and made myself accepted to those cooperative leaders, so that they proposed me for councillorship. (No. 35, Van, July 11, 2012)

Firstly, the area where the bazaar is has the highest land value in Van (at least until the earthquake). But when the cooperative organized to open up a bazaar, the municipality presided by SHP was just beginning zoning the area. So after two decades, the accumulation of capital in the area also raised the land value dramatically. Secondly, the image of municipal police chasing informal street vendors is a clear example of criminalization of urban poor. But also street vendors symbolize the lowest point of entering commercial activity because of its low capital. Thus, collective economy and action allowed bringing together relatively small capital holders together and with municipal help and community support the displaced found themselves a place in urban commercial activity which is a prerequisite of attaining urban identity. This and other solidarity actions are examples of collective urbanization and motivate some of the councilors to be active in local politics. In this case, the councilor is a representative of collective urbanization efforts.

But in terms of the larger picture, the new political economy has a gloomier picture. In terms of individuals who make up the significant majority, inclusion into lucrative economical organizing is highly unlikely. A councilor told me that the compensation he received for being forcibly displaced amounted to only the quarter of his actual loss. Another aspect of the amount of compensation is that it only sufficed to build a house. Obtaining property of one's own houses may seem like a

positive outcome, but these houses also became shackles limiting the mobility of the displaced since these cities did not offer them ample job opportunities.

Both of these aspects are quite important to understand current political economy and why inclusion into urban production for majority is not realized. The loss of actual production coupled with a diminished return as compensation withered present capital and curbed any accumulation. This especially stripped away any economical leverage from many private parties to be included in the urban political economy through entrepreneurial activity. Since these cities and their rural periphery had been historically interdependent, the destruction of rural economy also directly affected the urban economy and this effect has been present for a quarter century. While the Region had been the least developed region in Turkey before the conflict, the forced displacement increased the level of regression because while livelihoods were destroyed novel relations of production were not created.

I want to conclude by underlining that there are many complementary dimensions of political economy, urbanization, immigration and forced displacement that have motivated individuals to mobilize and participate in local politics and get nominated for councillorship. In this subsection, I have showed that transition from rural to urban economy, socio-political experiences in other cities, adapting to cities and formation of urban identity through solidarity actions have been motivating factors for Kurdish actors.

Getting Elected

I supplied excerpts from interviews in an analytical way to better understand the political backgrounds of the informants that led to their participation in local politics.

In this subsection, I map out what sorts of backgrounds are regarded relevant by BDP for nomination and election based on my interviews with councilors. Before getting further into personal histories, I would like to point out to a testimony from a councilor, describing the types of repressive measures Kurdish actors have faced during elections. The excerpt below should emphasize that the motivation to run for local offices is not an easy decision considering it could lead to persecution.

I ran for the office of mayor [in a rural district of Diyarbakir] in 1999. We won the elections but unfortunately our ballots were stolen. I was the mayor until midnight. We had celebrations and received congratulations. After 11 o'clock the ballots were stolen. We lost the elections. The military Captain, I mean the commander himself; head official and police department all had a hand in this. They all collaborated for this. After that ANAP (Motherland Party) won the elections. Then they admit that they did it. They said "we regretted to take the office from you." You won the elections, they said to my brother who was the village head man (*muhtar*) at that time, we regret to take the office, ANAP said it... when I ran for office mayor 1999 they put me in custody whenever I came and whenever I went. On the road I was placed under custody for three or four hours on the way to go and again three hours more on the way back. When I was visiting shopkeepers I was asking to the authorities from the army or from the police department why they put me in custody, what is the reason, they were telling me that there were carrying out orders from above. They said "we don't know why we put you in custody either. We just take orders and carry out them." I mean I was fed up with it. I went to governor with my lawyer. He said he didn't want to receive a terrorist like me. I said "I swear you are the biggest terrorist. I am a candidate for office of mayor representing a political party. You have to approach me just the same way you approach ANAP. Let's say there will be five parties participating in the elections, you have to treat me as you treat the others." And he said "I do not consider your political party as a political party. You are a terrorist party. You receive your orders directly from PKK." Then don't place us in the elections. We are a political party; we are pursuing our political struggle. The election is a competition. I congratulate any party which would win and I walk away. But if you place obstacles on my way then you are making a mistake.⁵⁵ (No. 36, Diyarbakir, February 10, 2012)

⁵⁵ According to news articles there is evidence that Turkish officials did not act lawfully and attempted to prevent HADEP from winning by stealing votes.

HADEP'in seçimlerde engellendiği belgelendi [The obstruction of HADEP during elections have proof], Retrieved June 25, 2012 from www.sendika.org/yazi.php?yazi_no=18826.

11 yıl önce çalınan oylar ortaya çıktı! [Votes stolen 11 years ago appeared!] Retrieved June 25, 2012 from www.birgun.net/politics_index.php?news_code=1284297999&year=2010&month=09&day=12.

In the interview the councilor further stated that fraud continues in elections in the Region alongside persecution. Thus, when considering the backgrounds of activists those who chose to participate, I believe the resilience factor should be always taken into account.

There are five categories of backgrounds in politics that led to participation: the party, the women's movement, NGO, civil society, and personal acquaintances.⁵⁶ These categories are not mutually or chronologically exclusive in life trajectories as my interviews with councilors reveal. Backgrounds in the political party begin with the 1990's. The women's movement organized in collaboration with the party but also autonomously⁵⁷ and has been able to influence male-oriented decision making processes and enforce a quota for women. Since Kurdish movement is a larger umbrella organization than the political party, backgrounds in other social organizations also appear. In this sense NGO work and civil society organizations such as professional or commercial chambers become relevant in urban politics. Personal acquaintances also matter, but much less in comparison to other categories.

The decision to apply for candidateship also varies. There are instances where candidateship is offered or suggested by party officials. It is also possible that those interested personally applied for councillorship and went through intra-party elections. The instances where candidateship is offered are significant among others because there is a significant relationship between offer and personal background.

⁵⁶ I chose not to supply excerpts of certain trajectories because causality of participation and life trajectory has not been conveyed through their narratives. These trajectories are related to participation through personal acquaintances more than other categories. Some councilors had no previous engagement with municipal politics. Some did not wish to be elected. Few were persuaded for nomination. One of them regarded nomination to be socially advantageous. But all these trajectories came up with self attributed goals as to what their backgrounds can bring to the municipalities. Some of them were content with the work they had partaken and few of them considered the office to be a burden and declared their wish to resign.

⁵⁷ BDP's parliamentarian Emine Ayna describes this dynamic as "simultaneously being within the circle and outside" (Toplum ve Kuram Dergisi 2010: 142). Çağlayan's work (2007) is the most extensive work published on women's organizing within Kurdish movement.

Personal backgrounds in community organizing, civil society and NGO activism or profession are presented as reasons for the offers behind nomination. The instances where candidanship is suggested or a third person convinces the councilor to apply suggest spontaneity of the decision to participate. The motives for personal applications vary much more in comparison to other instances.

The backgrounds at the party for councilors involve being elected or appointed party officials who organized and mobilized throughout the 1990s and the 2000s. These activists strived to bring legitimacy to their cause before mobilizing local public offices. They are the local activists who followed the political tradition of HEP and endured dissolution of their political parties. When retelling their background in politics, these narratives are reoccurring especially when describing the repression. The common argument is that resisting and living through the repression allowed the political party to gain a firm foothold in the cities. People who participated in the political party at the peak of persecution and repression and built a local cadre base are still referred to for their bravery in politics. “When everyone was afraid to admit that they were Kurds, s/he was a party official” is a common expression for someone who has been organizing and retained a good reputation since the 1990s. The following statement is from a single interview but presents a compilation of reoccurring narratives:

In my youth, in 1990s, I pursued legal political activities in the party. In the 1990s, I mean people couldn't even pass through the street where the party was in those years, we were politically active. We were young then. People were really afraid of passing through the street where our party was. For example, I'll tell you an anecdote which I experienced, my own relatives wouldn't say hello to me for years because they were afraid. If we had saluted you, then the state would think that we were one of you, they thought so. Now they confess it; “In those years we couldn't salute you because we thought they would take us also into custody.” In the 1990s, which is also known as a period of unknown assailants, everybody, all Kurds who were politically active here, were in politics with their grave cloth in their pockets (*kefeni cebinde*), we can even say with their grave cloth hanging from their

necks. I remember so many friends of mine from those years, some of them are abroad, some of them were killed, and some of them were criminalized in some ways and forced out of politics. To be politically active and to have some ideals in this region is really hard. It was not easy to face and withstand all of these, it was a hard period. But with the struggle of Kurdish people and with the price which were paid by Kurdish youth's bodies the political process is in a different plane now. We came to these days thanks to the young who put their lives on the market in those years in Kurdistan where there was really a market for lives (*can pazarı*). (No. 37, Van, June 30, 2011)

The repression has been manifold in the Region including juridical, extra juridical activities and criminalization. The extra juridical activities ceased in the 2000s but other forms of repression mildly continued until the beginning of KCK court case. In this period the movement was able to consolidate its local activities and mobilize municipalities. This period is regarded as a success of the movement and its cause to achieve certain degree of legitimacy. However this is always underlined with the fact that many people subsequently, especially the youth, had sacrificed (*bedel vermek*) their lives to achieve the relative legitimacy of their cause. This is portrayed as a burden that motivates them to go on and further the cause. This sacrifice also endows them with a political burden to be a responsible and accountable municipality. The party members and officials concur on this point and by looking back at their own histories underpin that their place and election depends on the achievements of the struggle. These are all important findings because firstly they are reoccurring and secondly they relate to motivation of local actors on how to pursue political offices. On top of this motivation, mobilizing public offices also bears a strong political connotation of finally reaping material and representative benefits of long due struggle. BDP's local actors see their elections as another step in the continuation of their political struggle. However this is articulated as it has nothing to do with the idea of promotion or demotion in social status based on political position. I base

these analyses on the following statements while also underlining that local actors of BDP feel personal pride and socially elevated when elected:

I had been politically active for years and wanted to work to serve. I have always been politically active then I wanted to serve people. To be here right now gives me a different kind of pleasure. (No. 38, Diyarbakir, February 10, 2012)

I was a candidate again in 2004. I submitted my file. If I tell the reason why I was chosen it will be wrong; there must have been something so they chose me. At that time we gave our files, my comrades were offended, they didn't take my file or they didn't put me in a top of the list. Then I gave my turn to a comrade. They said "Why are you doing this" and they were offended. I am a member of the party, I will not be offended. The party is same to me even if I'm not a councilor. This comrade was a little offended so I gave him my turn. Then he also wasn't elected. I mean he wasn't elected since we didn't win the elections. (No. 39, Van, July 13, 2011)

Hence being in the political party affiliated with the movement was the important factor for the candidacy of certain councilors. Being part of the women's movement in the region was the second important factor in influencing candidacy of councilors. Three of the five women I interviewed were active in both the party and the women's movement prior to getting elected. Two of them were government employees which prevented direct participation to either but both have relatives participating in the movement and had sympathy towards the movement. Two of the women have been councilors for two consecutive terms which is significantly higher than the men I interviewed (two of them were previously elected in 1999 as councilors with few other councilors who ran but were not elected). Previously, I have showed that statistically the number of elected women councilors did not match the forty percent quota. Both the high rate of reelections and lower percentage of elected women signal that there is a lower women's participation to run for local offices than intended despite the dominance of the women's movement. The following statement reveals how the women's movement strives to mobilize women in their own

localities to run for public offices. The place mentioned below is a town municipality (*belde*) in the province of Van.

Actually we did something with our own effort. There was no infrastructure there and we solved eighty percent of the infrastructure problem. It is a town which received migrants, 80-90 percent of it is consisted of migrants whose villages were burned. Also, it was a town in which women were faced with psychological violence. A woman mayor and a woman municipal councilor being elected there made a great difference. There are still women in the municipality there. For example; only men used to go to the municipality but after that, women started to come. Women started to come to tell about infrastructural and water problems, economical and psychological problems. Actually it was understood that women can also do something. This process still goes on. The town has changed and transformed... I actually live in Van. It was difficult for me to commute to the town. When I was a municipal councilor I helped a successor. In 2004 we didn't have a woman municipal councilor there; nobody ran for the elections in spite of all our efforts. Actually we served as a model. We also trained our backups. After us, women who wanted to that job, who are volunteers ran for the elections. So I didn't need to be a candidate again since I believe we had more to do here. (No. 40, Van, August 4, 2011)

Consequently, the party was able to form its own women cadres in the town. The population is mostly comprised of the displaced. The mayor of the town has been a woman since 2004. The important indication of this statement is that narratives of women regarding their own organizing relates to an experience that begins from scratch. This reveals that any affirmative action or positive discrimination alone in itself does not produce the desired end result. In fact, how the incipient women participation in political offices in their local settings brings local women towards municipality as an intended outcome is quite successful for establishing wider grassroots participation.

The women are considered to be the worst off by the forced displacement. The discourse of the movement establishes this as a fact and urges participation of women. The ways in which women are affected have several different layers. In terms of lack of municipal services and shortages, housewives are the first segment in the society that is directly affected. But also the economic problems that ravage

the majority of the displaced are experienced more severely by women than men because they virtually had no access to labor market after arriving to cities parallel to global transformation (Alkan 2005: 71). There were not only traditional gender roles at play but also language impediment for Kurdish women who do not speak Turkish. In parallel, the common reason of women interviewees for participating in local politics has been working towards economic emancipation of women. A councilor in Van especially stressed this reason and told that even though she wanted to work with in NGO she could not find any organization where women's economic problems were central to of the agenda of the NGO. The NGOs that she visited dwell on providing legal help, she asserted, which she felt was not sufficient. Later on when I asked her to elaborate more on democratic autonomy, the motivation behind her participation and her thoughts on women's problems followed through:

The main article of democratic autonomy is local. And people who work the most in local are women. We say "from grassroots to top" and grassroots are us, women. Local problems are mostly of women. The problems are directly about us. And in that matter as women we should know about our rights and about what to do and we should constitute what we should know. If we cannot do it we shouldn't expect the autonomy to reach success. If women don't undertake this duty, autonomy will not reach its aim. When we go out as women's assembly we asked women a couple of times "What do you think about autonomy?" An old mother said "We think of the autonomy as sharing. That is, we think of it as helping each other. We think that our problem is common." I cared about those words a lot. I thought that so our women know about it but we should organize and work about their activism and strength. We should make women the addressees of this matter. (No. 41, Van, August 2, 2011)

Women's perspective of the drastic effects of rapid urbanization following the forced displacement is fundamentally based on material needs and solidarity. This is an important finding that suggests that increasing participation of women would create novel dynamics in these municipalities. This statement situates material background of motivation behind participation quite clearly. The women councilors generally situate their interest in politics in terms of gender issues and the predominant concern

for them are based on economic and material conditions of the displaced women. As activists, the grassroots feed them with the imminence of these problems as well as its perceived immediate solution. This is perhaps related to the fact that the displaced women have been left outside the economic relations in the society in the last two decades. However the predominant impediment among women's organizing is not related to dynamics outside their society but lay within themselves: it is a reflection of hardships that the women's organizing has been facing in their localities.

Nomination process has several steps: application, the platform and public voting but what is decisive is the party decision. The platform is a committee composed of non-candidate party officials, especially from Local Governments branch, which determines eligibility of a candidate in terms of party principles. If found eligible, party members vote for candidates they wish to see nominated. The final decision belongs to party officials in charge of nomination which take the mayor's cabinet, public voting and local political dynamics in consideration when finalizing the list. Local political dynamics involve getting representatives from NGOs, civil society and in Van also dominant tribes. Two councilors openly revealed their uneasiness with the issue. The councilors who stalled me – and I felt that it was intentionally – are the councilors with tribe affiliations. I retained this knowledge through other sources of information. I cannot locate a direct relationship between informant willingness and tribe affiliation. Yet the following excerpt makes a statement on how the functioning of the municipal council is related to its composition:

When municipal councilors are being elected, they are not being elected thinking like there will be someone in the municipality who knows about that profession. It is not only applicable for a particular party it is applicable for the whole region. Though partially passed over, there is still family and community relations and feudal approaches. They may not be that obvious but they are still in minds. They are also in the minds of politicians. These

relations are minded when councilors are being elected. What are these relations? Let's don't offend this community and take a candidate from them, take a candidate from drivers association, one from this tribe. There are so many people in Van from Şırnak, we should have a municipal councilor from there. There are approaches like these. When these are determinants it is not right to expect the municipal council to act scientifically. (No. 42, Van, June 30, 2011)

Among councilors there are competing views on what a municipal council should reflect. This particular one belongs to a councilor whose profession provides technical input in municipal affairs. This evaluation reveals that BDP prefers a coalition of local actors with complementary and distinctive political backgrounds over technical expertise in a municipal council.

What is the trade off when political variance trumps over informed candidanship? Kurdish movement is comprised of several social organization frameworks. This makes it obvious that municipal councillorship is regarded as a post to feed the municipality from complementary social spheres of urban life. Thus, whose personal background is deemed appropriate to ensure this feed becomes important. Also, what kind of motivation to participate in local politics of BDP is relevant? The following excerpts reveal that personal backgrounds which are regarded to be selfless, honest and hardworking by peers became appropriate and meanwhile motivation to participate among councilors who are critical of previous social and political relations – patronage politics and traditional leaders – is relevant for local politics of BDP.

The excerpts below are examples of how someone's work history and the virtues attached to it became a reason for the person to be seen an eligible candidate for nomination by his peers at the party:

I worked in this municipality as a cleaning worker (*çöpçü*). I worked in the station as a carrier. My children were young, when I went home my wife was crying. My mother was alive. I wasn't like this in the village. I had many fields, I had everything. I was like a lord (*ağa*) I apologize for saying that I

know feudalism (*ağalık*) is not a good thing. But I came here, carrying coal until the evening... Not to be hungry, for my children not to be hungry, to give them few pennies... We did all of these. When I was politically active at the party, the party didn't have an income. You'll ask how you managed. I would go to Yüksekova to bring Iranian sugar and rice and sell them in the neighborhood and earn few pennies in that way. I would go to Hakkari, there were goods from Iraq, and I would bring them with minibuses and sell. My children got older two of them would work in coffee shops on summer vacations. I mean for daily needs. I was also active in the party. My comrades, I owe to them, considered me and said you are honest and you don't look for unearned income and benefit so we recommend you for the municipal council. (No. 43, Van, July 14, 2011)

"I was nominated for the office of mayor again in a rural district of Diyarbakir. But I said that I had carried out my duty and I recommended another comrade. But the comrades in the election community didn't give my file back. They said "We need you. You will undertake that responsibility at least in a central district." For us, duty is important. If we can serve for our people we'll do it voluntarily." (No. 44, Diyarbakir, February 10, 2012)"

Honesty and integrity are two virtues that appear in reoccurring narratives especially with the councilors from Van. The platform at the party before determining eligibility of nomination stipulated that upon election no councilor can ask or expect that relatives up to 3rd degree be employed by the municipality or receive a contract. It is quite a rigid structural stipulation to ensure councilors do not embezzle or initiate clientalist networks. This is the general policy of BDP but appeared more during the interviews in Van. In Diyarbakir organizational and political backgrounds are more determining; these virtues appeared less meanwhile most councilors portrayed their election to have happened upon suggestion of their peers who felt that their election is necessary for mobilizing municipalities. The interviewees all argued that no one in their term of councillorship committed public fraud.

Clientalism and patronage in the history these municipalities have been long present. It is also enmeshed with community and tribe ties which used to determine outcomes of local elections Since Diyarbakir witnessed an earlier period of rapid growth in the urban locality in the 1970s the community and tribe ties that stem from

traditional and mostly rural backgrounds had already loosened. As a result of other solidarity networks and economic incentives become more important and material conditions and popular demands gain significance for the local electorate. Diyarbakir witnessed this phenomenon before Van and the statement below is an example of the transition in Van:

I saw that elders were making their choices in elections in return for favor. For example, that person is our relative; this person is our tribal leader. We'll vote for the one that he will. It doesn't matter for whom he is working. Back then state institutions were hiring a lot of people. You were able to work in a state institution then. I'll give you my vote and you'll give my son a job. There were approaches like these. Later when we considered the general situation, I said democracy and human rights before everything. If there is no democracy and human rights in a country it has no chance but to collapse... When I was a member of the party both in the period of HADEP and DEHAP, especially in the period of HADEP, the party had already had the municipality. I was interested in it. Sometimes I was working with mayors and others... I was following. And in the periods after that again, you know our party's political strategy, unlike the other parties of the system we don't pay attention to people only in times of elections, we always do it. We pay attention to their problems. If I am elected I will contribute to this matter. So I decided. I applied for it. And on the basis of the recommendations I was elected. (No. 45, Van, July 20, 2011)

Locating the transition is important however in terms of the focus at hand, actors who want to be the part of political force which set out to determine the path of the transition is important. In this sense, participation in local politics is a result of critical engagement with previous modes of social and political organization; as much as changing conditions in life styles.

There are also other issues at hand in this statement. The relationship between local agents and tribes in the history of local politics is portrayed on the axis of clientalism. This mode of relationship is attributed to mainstream political parties in Turkey whose concerns are creating patronage networks where public funds are distributed in exchange for votes (Entessar 1992: 87). This had been possible when members of extended families and tribes intervened on behalf of mainstream political

parties to channel the votes. In comparison, the concerns of BDP reflect other social and political issues such as accountability and social justice that are more universally based and imminent to the sustenance of a stable society. The policies of the movement curb the axis of clientalism based on tribes because the experience of conflict in 1999 where tribal affiliates and party officials led the loss of the municipality. The main concerns are democracy and human rights whose defense in the region is shouldered by the party. This is also linked with the capacity of BDP to provide public services outside patronage and clientalist networks. The councilor makes an informed and rational political decision to participate in BDP local politics to become part of a municipality whose civic responsiveness continues in between elections through public engagement.

The previous excerpt from a councilor from Van is an example of the transition because in the interview the councilor also pointed out that his treatment as a Kurdish worker determined his political consciousness. Becoming a worker within the wage system and adapting to urban zone and its political economy marks how material conditions have shaped the political will of the person outside his traditional feed of political orientation. The social dynamics that led to Zana's election inform us that in Diyarbakir the popular political will had been strayed from traditional and tribal ties long ago which had left mainstream political parties incapacitated to organize local electorate.

Councilors from civil society and NGO backgrounds on the other hand underlined their informed decision to apply for candidatureship usually following a suggestion that they participate. The excerpt below belongs to a human rights activist worked for İHD in Van before getting elected:

Before the 2009 local election, an offer came from DTP through a friend who was active in civil society. This offer was delivered to all NGO's that time.

There were some propositions. Many people had proposed that I become a councilor. Friends at the party came and talked to me too. Before the elections, DTP conducted a survey in Van, among members and applicants. I mean, a survey is conducted for those who apply for councillorship. When I applied, there were a total number of 80 applications. I was the first according to the survey. I got the highest vote. In the election's list, I was fourth placed. (No. 46, Van, July 30, 2011)

Human Rights activism is also a motivation to challenge existing social and political structures. Within Kurdish movement, I have delineated before that Human Rights activists, especially from İHD often became motivated to participate in local politics; as well as general elections. Just like activists and people critical of previous social and political organizations, people with religious backgrounds and training who have been critical of politics have been motivated to participate in local politics. Among them I find a single trajectory of a retired Imam to be worth further examining:

I decided to be a municipal councilor in 2009. It is really important to serve people. To serve and to help as a person who is educated (*ilim sahibi*). The majority decides; it is like these both in religion and in the world. Everybody says their opinion, everybody is free to think. Our mayor said it for many times. If I am elected here then I'm mayor of everybody, will it be Turks, Kurds, Arabs and non-Muslims. For example if a church demands service then I will serve to them. It is like that in religion too. There will be no discriminations. We will do as the mayor says. People are the same despite their different thoughts. They deserve to be served... We were carrying out our duty in 1990s. They asked me one day, which party do you support, I said, the supporters of all parties come to my mosque but I am alone with my conscience behind the curtain. They offered me. It is a political work but I don't interfere with. If you are a man of religion you will be out of politics. Why? Because he is a man of religion. (No. 47, Diyarbakir, March 9, 2012)

I believe the reasons and motivations behind these lines underpin the diversity claims of BDP in a fashion that is quite unorthodox in comparison to political traditions in Turkey. A retired Imam elected as a public official from a political party with secular and leftist heritage is uncommon. However this does not imply that the tradition of the political party diverted from its secular claims. The discourse of the councilor supports these claims and makes a strong case for another claim of secularism. Local institutions have not been made responsible for delivering services to churches and

synagogues or other temples. However in Sur, the municipality helps restoring of churches and is undertaking a project to build an Alewite temple.

The diversity of ethnicity and religion in the old city of Diyarbakir which had never been appreciated by local institutions since the formation of the republic also appears in this statement. During a council session which I attended, the council passed a decision to offer tax exemption for shops which would hang signs in a second language other than Turkish. This shows that the municipality actively supports and encourages the public display of diverse linguistic backgrounds. The official ideology of the republic for a long time had persecuted claims to other linguistic heritages on the basis that they may disturb national unity. In Sur, the local actors seek to find alternative means to reverse the outcomes of monolithic cultural and ethnic claims of the official ideology.

The example of Sur municipality and its claims and actions are visible examples that BDP cherishes cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity under its party program. But this also reveals a tangible example of how such cherishment can find a place in municipal politics. I wanted to bring forth this example due to its visibility and also because I wanted to restate my argument on the diversity of backgrounds of BDP's local actors. Following all my findings and analysis in this chapter, I argue that BDP as a political party welcomes people of diverse backgrounds. These backgrounds could be related to people who were affected by all aspects of the conflict, political stature and official ideology. I assert that this aspect of the party allows for the cultivation of a political subjectivity under its umbrella; thus maintains a resilient electoral and cadre base. As the political context changed after 1999, this cadre and electoral base began mobilizing municipalities hoping to mitigate the ill effects of rapid urbanization caused by the forced displacement of Kurdish peasants.

However inclusion in BDP is also restrictive to certain social backgrounds and political opinions. I have previously conceptualized Kurdish movement as an urban social movement which absorbs popular strata. In this sense, the grievances which motivate Kurdish local actors to participate in local politics are urban related and popular based. At the time of the research, these grievances have not been changed or reformulated. Thus, people whose social backgrounds motivate them to participate in local politics for purposes other than addressing grievances of collective urbanization, in the words of interviewees those seeking material interest, are not welcomed. And also, people with economic backgrounds who could indeed mobilize resources for personal gains – such as contractors and small scale producers – are also representatives of professional or occupational collectives; their inclusion is stipulated by the requirement that they represent a certain strata, not just themselves.

As such, people who do not accept the claims of Kurdish identity and culture, legitimacy of Kurdish insurgency and recognize Öcalan as the leader of Kurdish people – yet be critical of Öcalan but at least recognize his position – are not welcomed by local spheres of Kurdish movement. Despite the fact that these realities often create reasons for persecution, Kurdish movement is staunch in the sense that activists articulate these lines of arguments.

Administrative Reform and Collective Consumption

In this subsection, I dwell on the motivating reasons of factors for participating in local politics that developed through engagement with municipal politics and professional expertise such as urban planning and architecture. These reasons and

factors are articulated as ideas of administrative reform at the local level. The ideas of administrative reform at the local level have developed by Kurdish actors due to two aspects of their life trajectories: collective urbanization and municipal experience.

Through their engagement with local politics Kurdish actors have devised their cause as the establishment of local popular sovereignty over collective consumption which determines local political and urban trajectories. As members of the popular strata, Kurdish actors regard themselves legitimate actors for establishment of local popular sovereignty. By mobilizing municipalities and local governments, these actors purport to determine how collective consumption would take place. Collective consumption is a local political phenomenon, where urban development trajectories, social justice and resource distribution is determined. To reveal the relevance of these arguments, I resort to interviews with councilors and revisit the literature on urban development.

The following excerpt belongs to a councilor whose professional experience is based on urban development and preparing strategic plans for municipalities in the Region. Among numerous accounts of similar arguments raised during the interviews, I chose only one excerpt which I deem to reflect the whole sum of ideas. The ideas that he has developed regarding the administrative apparatus in Turkey is thus related to his profession and engagement with local governments as a contracted professional:

In Turkey ever since the formation of the Republic, there has been a sort of an administrative apparatus. Some people sat down and made plans like; this district is close to that district, this district is big, it should be a city, that district is small it should be under the jurisdiction of that one... At this point it occurred that these were not rational plans to work out. But the logic of the state which is reactionary and conservative worries about protecting itself in some ways and doesn't approach to changing the administrative system. Instead of an administrative reform, they look for the alternative way. They

prepare an environmental plan. What do they consider? Streams, stream basins, shared basins or borders of the closed basins like Lake of Van, climatic conditions, geographic conditions. They prepare new plans considering these conditions. (No. 48, Van, June 20, 2011)

In the Region geography is imagined different from the administrative map of Turkey. This imagined geography is the result of the historical relations of regional interdependence. In this statement, the councilor makes a claim that state planning has not taken actual relations of interdependence into consideration and thus they were irrational. By articulating that central actors and currently appointed actors at the local are reactionary and conservative; the councilor situates his political tradition as reformist. In this sense, what line of reform he proposes becomes important to understand. Since, his examples of the current amendments in planning ideology of the state have been solely on physical conditions, I asked whether there were any social and cultural conditions taken into consideration by the state actors:

Q: Do they consider only physical conditions? Don't they consider the social and cultural conditions?

A: I'll come to that matter. The state was able to cover only this far. After a hundred years they understood that they cannot think independent of geography. A part of one stream basin is in Bitlis the other part of it is in Van. They recently gave up the idea that that part is Van's business the other is Bitlis'. They now understand that the streams are a whole. Or they just started to think that they can make a common program for Bitlis and Van because the air pollution in Van affects also Bitlis. And this will have a second phase. What is it? There are the social conditions of people, their ethnicity, and their economic status in that phase. They will now plan it may be after a fifty or a hundred years. We have to accelerate this process. We have to do it without waiting for the state. The state says, I cannot establish State Hydraulic Works (DSİ) in Ağrı, they are aware of that fact. DSİ must be in regional. Or they will establish a highway networks; they know that they cannot establish a highway authority in each city, there must be authorities in each region. For example, Patnos is a district of Ağrı but its highways are under the jurisdiction of Van. Starting from the villages at the end of Patnos the highways are under the jurisdiction of Erzurum. *Actually the state have already autonomized these areas. They are now in a state of accepting it; they don't have the flexibility to accept it. They did it already.* (No. 49, Van, June 20, 2011)

In order to establish any planning that takes into consideration these relations local institutions must be strengthened and become central to making decisions. The strengthening of local institutions, however, is not only possible by raising competences of actors appointed by the central state to the local but also increasing the influence and power of locally elected actors. Locally elected actors have better chance of grasping conditions of regional interdependence and implementing policies in accord. Most importantly, he argues that state institutions and central authority in fact has realized the importance of the relations of regional interdependence and made effort to reorganize its planning processes. In this sense, two questions become central: what these institutions do and how services are delivered by them is related to local political economy.

The nature of resource distribution of the centralized state concerning the urban localities is fundamental. In Turkey, urbanization always has compelled “more central involvement in the cities – in the form of resources, rules, skills and responses to political demands” (Danielson and Keleş 1982: 222). This tendency has made the state the biggest investor and consumer in the process of urbanization; and winning offices became the equivalent of steering how these resources would be distributed. On the relationship between urbanization, capitalism and state in Castells’ work, Merrifield provides a summary that bears essential arguments:

Castells bring much greater sophistication to his analysis, while upping the stakes of the game. The production of collective goods, he feels, has helped big capital stave off sagging profit rates. The capitalist state assumes the bulk of the risk; it becomes the chief provider of *collective consumption*; picks up the tab; *initiates and coordinates public housing, schooling, subways, buses and trains; funds hospitals; treats waste; intervenes via planning agencies and zoning legislation*. Castells maintains that state intervention in collective consumption offsets the endemic crises of overproduction and systemic reproduction. It becomes something of a crisis manager, ameliorating the system’s internal contradictions, yet unleashing other, deeper contradictions while demarcating new arenas of political conflict. ... Collective consumption mollified labor and acted strategically in the interest of capital;

but it equally incited labor, too, *politicizing hitherto unpoliticized aspects of social life* (Merrifield 2002: 120).

The services provided in line with collective consumption, however, is brought with the modernization effect of Turkish nation statehood which has become the central grievance for Kurdish identity (Gambetti 2009a, Jongerden 2009). Even though the state's intervention has begun to imprint Turkishness in the Region, especially with the rapid urbanization in the whole country soon necessitated that this intervention be coupled with services.

In this sense, when local actors of BDP articulate their demand to assume the role of the state in terms of services; it is apparent that their demand is to fully control the collective consumption. Since BDP actors are not presently in control of these resources in all sense and do not exercise power without tutelage, their demands are still related to aspects of social life "hitherto unpoliticized." Thus, the administrative reform demands that have developed through their engagement with local politics are inextricably related to capitalist mode of development of their urban development and their wish to control collective consumption.

Conclusion

This chapter illuminated the motivating reasons and factors for BDP's local actors to organize at the local level and get involved in local politics by looking into their life trajectories. The analysis began with the initial formulation of their cause to underpin more complex issues at hand. How pre-1980 coup politics have affected political orientations of the councilors, how the conflict with the start of guerilla warfare was experienced by the councilors, what happened at their urban localities during arrival of the displaced peasantry have been addressed through life trajectories. These

experiences with motivation to participate in local politics and get elected through their own narratives are linked.

The events that have led individuals to participate in local politics in Diyarbakir and Van through Kurdish movement revealed complex causalities that transcend the reasons of increased channels of participation, suppression of Kurdish identity or political and economic gains through local offices. These reasons are also present and superficially observable however the narratives of these actors on their life trajectories show that common grievances developed through rapid urbanization and the conflict and the critiques of state formation, development and modernization formed by personal experience and community organizing intersecting the common grievances and personal experiences have been central to motivate towards participation in local politics. As such, I argue that BDP as a political party welcomes people of diverse backgrounds of people who were affected by all aspects of the conflict, political stature and official ideology. This aspect of the party allows for the cultivation of a political subjectivity under its umbrella; thus maintains a resilient electoral and cadre base. However inclusion to BDP is restrictive depending on social class and political stance.

The fieldwork showed that life stories matter in politics. In parallel, the extent of personal experience motivating towards political participation has been conveyed by informants making the analysis easier to underpin the relationship. Personal histories proved to be a dominant reason for nomination and election. In terms of visibility of material interest and motivation towards participating, I have discovered that the formulation of BDP's local politics mattered more than personal regarding material interests however as for motivating factors personal experience prevailed more than BDP's local agenda. Thus there is a collective formulation of material

interest which is derived from multiplicity of personal motivating factors. This relationship keeps expanding the base of BDP's local activists allowing for cultural and social diversity to prevail. Meanwhile Kurdish Movement with its New Left, gender oriented and ecological claims provides structured principles for the expanding base. This expanding base is composed of local actors who chose to participate within local electoral and party politics in a grandeur framework of liberation movement that was set out pursuing a military strategy in the 1980's.

Through urban politics of BDP, Kurds in the Region are remaking their encounter and reevaluating their exposure to modernity. This time, they want to be the subject of their own experience. The experience in the municipalities have led to contemplate an administrative reform that allows them to become more influential and powerful in determining collective consumption which would allow them to determine their future experience.

The cause for national liberation of the 1990s seems to be a thing of the past. Now, the cause is to achieve political recognition of their subject-position as the legitimate actor to determine how modernization, civilization and urbanization will be constituted in the Region. The following chapter seeks to address how municipalities are utilized to establish the legitimacy of Kurdish actors in determining their development and modernization path.

CHAPTER IV

KURDISH URBAN POLITICS IN THE NEOLIBERAL ERA

The representative from a neighborhood assembly of Sur District, an old timer delivers a message to the mayor, Baydemir, about stray dogs bothering citizens. The mayor receives the message and tells that the problem will be taken care of. The municipality neuters the stray dogs. Hearing that the problem is not “taken care of”, the representative rushes to see Baydemir again: “President Osman (*Osman Başkan*), why do you take us for fools! I never said dogs were screwing us, I said they were bothering us!”⁵⁸

The governor’s office began the project for the freeway without consulting us and decided to expropriate without paying people. We researched how similar projects were going on other cities. We found that in Rize, the hometown of the governor, the state was going to pay for full market price of land and not going to invoke free expropriation of forty percent of land for public good clause. Well, we asked the governor why he wanted to apply double standard, whether he did not see Van as his hometown. Realizing the kind of public reaction our finding could create, he backed down.⁵⁹

How Kurdish movement mobilizes municipalities when the ongoing conflict intersects with neoliberal transformations at the local government level in Turkey is addressed in this penultimate chapter. What are their experiences as municipal councilors of BDP and also Kurdish activists within the immersed circle with respect

⁵⁸ This anecdote was told to me by someone who was friends with one of Baydemir’s aides.

⁵⁹ Bekir Kaya, the mayor of Van told me this personally. I shortened the full details of the story.

to accomplishments, aspirations and impediments? I begin the analysis by referring to findings through interviews, and I continue to present data through ethnographic observations. I validate certain aspects and facts that have been raised during the interviews with municipal personnel, statistics and other research.

In the previous chapter, I have showed through motivating reasons and factors for participation in local politics that why councilors decide to participate is also related to how they wish to utilize local offices. In this chapter, I bring a larger perspective and diversify data sources to underpin how in fact these municipalities are mobilized by these actors. In this sense, the context of conflict and especially neoliberal reforms are determining factors.

One of the most appealing aspects of studying Kurdish movements is that, especially in the Region, the public sphere is vivid and reflexively contemplating on the actions, deed and outcomes of movement adherents. After I stated my research interest, a social worker employed by Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality revealed his discomfort to me for “applauding” two fundamentally different policies that were declared as important successes:

They made all busses in Viranşehir⁶⁰ public, proclaimed it as an important event, we applauded. Metropolitan Municipality privatized the busses, and that too was heralded as a great success, again we applauded. (No. 50, Diyarbakir, March, 2012)

I must again note that privatization is linked to neoliberal reforms; which is not only a scholarly argument (Harvey 2006) but also an acceptance among Kurdish activists. So I was not surprised to hear such critical approach to the municipality’s decision to privatize. In fact, critical engagement with actions of these municipalities has always been prevalent among activists I have met. The excerpt below seems like a response to these critical actors within the movement however outside local governments,

⁶⁰ Viranşehir is a district of Şanlıurfa. The municipality is run by BDP.

even though it is a self-criticism of the overall experience of Kurdish movement with local politics:

We have an experience in local governments for twelve and a half years. We consider the first five years with thirty five municipalities as gaining experience. The second five years is a state of turning this experience into resource. A real accessible resource of information and suggestions. I consider the third phase as resting this on the anticipation and turning this entirely into practice. This is how I consider the phase which I am in now. Our program on local governments wasn't dictated and it wasn't prepared ideologically. It is made out of our experiences and our categorization of successful and unsuccessful municipalities. Is it so good? It has so many deficiencies. (No. 51, Van, July 20, 2011)

In the rest of this chapter, as parallel to the time of the research, I examine mostly the third phase of this decade-long experience. The chapter is divided into main subsections: Kurdish Urban Politics and Countering Neoliberalism. In Kurdish Urban Politics section, I look into how municipalities had been mobilizing space is studied and state the concepts and focus of this research. Through the data obtained by interviews with councilors, I assert that there is a strong link between life trajectories and civic and urban demands and why local politics became central for the movement. I argue that the Democratic Autonomy construed at local level by Kurdish actors, first, is defended in terms of solving the conflict and, second, is being discussed in the sphere of countering the negative effects of the conflict, uneven development and especially neoliberal interventions.

In the second subsection, I look into how neoliberal interventions are countered and also adapted or localized according to Yüksel (2011) by the movement, in the spheres of urban expansion, welfare and labor regime. I resort to ethnographic observations and interview with municipal personnel to support my arguments. And finally, I analyze intramunicipal cooperation spearheaded by the administration in Diyarbakir since 2005 under GABB (Union of Municipalities of South East Anatolia), through my interviews with its personnel, to show how uneven

geographic development and other neoliberal maxims are countered. I argue that in spheres where the neoliberal interventions of the central state allow Kurdish actors leverage, the municipalities are mobilized to counter the effects of neoliberalism.

Kurdish Urban Politics

Space and Modernization

Before looking into space and modernization in the Region, I would like to restate how I formulate identity politics, civic and urban demands. By identity politics I underpin two related issues. Firstly, I refer to the demands of the movement at the national scale ranging from the solution of the conflict to recognition of cultural rights of Kurds and show how these demands have led to the articulation of Democratic Autonomy. Secondly, I underline the specific actions of the movement that cultivate Kurdish identity and groupness which are happening at the local level. The municipalities have been expending resources and utilizing their capabilities to ground and realize an urban context for their demands regarding the first issue. The reflection of these practices falls onto the second issue where Kurdish groupness in the cities is spatially reproduced.

Civic issues are related to citizens' access to resources of municipal services; cultural, educational and recreational are based on public participation and willingness. Urban issues are related to citizens' demands of infrastructure and superstructure and are technical requirements for basic services. Both these issues have been the result of rapid urbanization caused by the arrival of the displaced. However identity issues are fundamentally different yet related to urban and civic

issues. The problems caused by rapid urbanization went along with the persecution of Kurdish identity. Thus, its recognition and prevalence also became a central political concern.

I have elaborated before that in the case of Diyarbakir; the metropolitan municipality was able to solve infrastructural problems, whereas in Van the municipality had had short term emergency solutions with long term visions for completing the basic infrastructure. The delivery of basic services is the first step to appease civic and urban demands of the locals. Failing to undertake them resulted in the loss of the local elections for incumbents in Van, HADEP and then AKP. But in the case of Diyarbakir, the ongoing success in local elections was based on the ability of local actors to mobilize the municipality beyond mere delivery of basic services.

Gambetti offers explanations into the undertakings of Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipalities and locates that “the municipality, elected by the Kurdish population in Diyarbakir, simply had to move in to fill in the places left vacant by the central state institutions and, in doing so, contributed to transforming the migrants into urban actors” (Gambetti 2009a: 115). The majority of the forced migrants already were denaturalizing “the effective identification of state, nation and space” by disrupting “the inscription of state power on space by twisting or disregarding regulations concerning urban existence” (Gambetti 2009a: 107). I have observed that these arguments are still relevant, not only in Diyarbakir but also in Van. The municipality established structures (edifices and plazas) where these actors could fill and mold the agency of their own cultural and identity claims.

The space created and offered for urban actors stem from Diyarbakir and spread to other cities. First, large complexes where cultural and social events organized by the municipality and the actors from the larger spectrum of the

movement are either built or under construction. These complexes allow people to congregate autonomously⁶¹ and outside urban spaces marked with national symbols of the Turkish Republic.

In parallel, municipalities have Educational Support Houses (*Eğitim Destek Evi*) where students preparing for university entrance exams who cannot support to attend a private institution are offered free courses. These houses aim to offer support for the disadvantaged students in the Region. Also, by employing teachers sympathetic to the movement, municipalities create financially opportunities to university graduates however small in numbers.

In neighborhoods, smaller spaces are designated for use determined according to need and decision of the neighborhood councils. The common uses are for community meetings and condolences services. Likewise, laundry houses, libraries and women centers are also built for public use, especially in residential areas.

The urban space carved by these actions stand both in contrast and as replicas to services and spaces offered by other institutions of the state. They stand in contrast in terms of identity and representation they offer to their users. But they are replicas in the exact modernizing effect of Turkish nation-state. They do not mimic the practices of the state that create the modernizing effect in macro representation and biopolitical interventions however convey the similar effect on a micro level through

⁶¹ Congregating autonomously is more important in the Region than it seems at first glance. By autonomously, I mean a space where activists can congregate without being hindered by lack of resources. İHD activists in Van told me that couple of years ago when they wanted to hold a seminar on anti-militarism and invite conscientious objectors, they approached the head of Van Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VATSO) since congregation spaces were limited. Their request was denied by the head humorously with a tap on their shoulders: “you are young and healthy as a lion, what is that you are objecting?”

enabling encounters with urban modernity. This is humanizing and personalizing the modernization process.⁶²

The interviewed councilors want the Region to experience its own modernization process but not according to wishes of the state and its official ideology but in line with their aspirations and identity claims. Some state explicitly that the disparity of development between Turkey and the Region is an actual indicator that the country is in fact divided. Especially underlining their encounters with urban localities in the west, they underpin these wishes.

However when the movement won the elections for thirty six municipalities in 1999, the primary purpose was to use the municipalities for bringing identity issues of Kurds forward; not addressing issues of development or even curbing patronage and embezzlement according to activists in Van. This policy could not have been sustained for long. Basically due to the fact that municipality is the primary service delivery institution at urban locality and to the failure to address urban problems, the movement experienced setbacks in the 2004 local elections in some major cities, especially in Van. The movement regarded these setbacks as warnings from the electorate and especially focused on their policies in Diyarbakir. Eventually BDP municipalities began implementing policies and arguments that brought together politics of identity and urban and civic demands. As such, talk of radical economy and alternative political institutions increased.

The convergence of identity, urban and civic demands can be located by looking through spatial policies of the movement in the municipalities. I use the concepts from the work of Jongerden (2009) on space and its social production and reproduction. I also utilize the analytical distinctions he makes about how space is

⁶² Gambetti's (2009a) article offer observational details about these encounters, parallel to my own observations.

constituted: physically and discursively. In this sense his conceptualization of three aspects of space is relevant to my own analysis:

First, space is the product of social practices, constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimate tininess of the local. Second, space is the sphere of the possibility of multiple trajectories: the story of the world cannot be told merely as the story of those in power. Third, space is always under construction (and therefore there is no ‘end of space’): when new (social and political) relations are established and new ‘connections’ made, space itself is transformed (Jongerden 2009: 3).

Jongerden delineates how space became a concern of the state for nation building and reveals how municipalities run by the movement “counter the hegemonic domination of urban space, again through the machinery of state, but at a more local level” (2009: 15). To a large extent this counter hegemonic move is based on the renaming of places in the urban space. I take these as examples of discursive production of space. I aim to extend the scope of this argument and also look into how physical production of space is also relevant to counter the hegemony of the central state and fill social vacuums of the neoliberal state.

The renaming of these urban spaces is related to Kurdish identity and history while also bearing gender oriented and Leftist inclinations of the movement (Jongerden 2009: 14). I suggest in my analysis that these are initial materialization of identity claims and ideological orientations of the movement. During the first term of the movement’s engagement with the municipalities after 1999, these claims and orientations were not realized because the struggle was mostly based on making Kurdish reality appear in the national political sphere more than local. Coupled with inexperience in local service delivery, the movement was also incapacitated to forge physical space in urban localities. But after 2004, the movement began countering the hegemony of the state in creating urban space, both discursively, as Jongerden shows, and physically, as I aim to show. I assert that, especially in terms of physical

production of urban space, the movement was finally able to address civic and urban grievances of the displaced. My purpose is to show how identity politics and civic and urban demands (of the movement vis-à-vis the state, and of the local urbanites vis-à-vis the municipality) came together in producing urban space. I suggest that there is an established link between politics and demands; and how they constitute each other have political significance in order to explain the aspirations of the local actors.

Linking Grassroots to Local Governments: Neighborhood Assemblies

Kurdish movement became a contender for local elections by organizing the grassroots of these cities. By realizing the importance of urban and civic grievances, the local activists of the movement began contemplating on ways to expand grassroots mobilizations. Since the political environment did not offer the new urban dwellers leverage through competing parties, the movement came up with a way to rekindle the grassroots mobilization through increased means of participation. There are also other factors allowing their rise as contenders. In the 1990s, through the discourse of Islamic fraternity RP, later FP (Felicity Party) attempted to gain the votes of Kurds (Duran 1998). However their practices in the municipality and coalition with local elites did not bring services desired by the displaced. Other mainstream political parties lost votes because of their nationalist stances that denied Kurdish reality.

In this subsection, I delineate a policy of the movement to increase information feed from grassroots towards local governments. The policy is based on the establishment of neighborhood assemblies (*mahalle meclisleri*) or free citizens'

associations (*özgür yurttaş dernekleri*). I analyze the idea behind this policy and their current relevance in the mobilization of municipalities. I underline that I did not attend these assemblies thus my scope is not to discover their real conditions but their importance in the political discourse of the councilors and local actors. The data presented in this subsection is from interviews with councilors.

During the interviews, councilors in both Van and Diyarbakir underlined that their role is to serve and the public should hold them accountable for their actions. These arguments appear not as template sentences but followed by actual experiences and anecdotes. The common denominator of these arguments is that temporal longevity of service delivery induces civic responsiveness where actions of the municipality began to be seen as a civic prerogative. This goes with the rise of random citizens' inquiry into services (in situ, under construction, etc.) and demands of valid explanations for each and every project. Councilors claim that these demands increased as the municipalities undertook more projects. Councilors also underline that their popular backgrounds also instigate self confidence among citizens of Kurdish ethnicity. A councilor in Van stated that "citizens now can hold their head up high in state institutions which they previously entered bowing their head down" to draw upon the superiority of their approach in public offices. In this sense, councilors often regard assemblies as sites where elected and electorate can physically interact which is a politically enriching experience for them.

The councilors informed me about four aspects of the assemblies: functioning, political importance, inclusiveness and shortcomings. These aspects are interrelated with the movement's accountability, responsiveness and civic participation as being important elements of their mobilization of municipalities.

Each neighborhood has an assembly. Each councilor is a member of one (or more) assembly. Assemblies collect demands and wishes from street representatives and deliver them to the municipalities and follow the response. Assemblies investigate the validity of demands before presenting them to the municipality. Assemblies elect an influential person to represent themselves before the municipality.

The most compelling political importance of assemblies is *ensuring the information feed from people and disadvantaged parties*. Women councilors underline that reaching other women through assemblies is an important aspect of its political importance. The party members are usually summoned by assemblies to resolve social conflicts. Thus assemblies are regarded as bridges that connect the party with the grassroots in all spheres. And the movement underlines that governing the local would not be possible without including the local itself in the decision processes. As for their previous experience in the local institutions, when all state-society interaction was narrowed down to bureaucracy, favoritism and clientalism prevailed. Structurally curbing negative aspects of local governance and bringing participation into the picture, assemblies empower the local institutions. The elected public officials in this sense feel obliged to respond to calls from members of these assemblies because failing to do so would inevitably lead to loss of elections. Assemblies increase the venues through which local people can reach and connect to local institutions.

Inclusiveness is not limited to party members or supporters. It is an open and flexible platform for everyone who wishes to participate. Councilors state that they are content with the existence of assemblies since they facilitate their jobs by including and providing opportunities for people to participate and contribute. When

the municipality is making a decision, the public is informed through assemblies. In case there is a dissention or non-approval of a project by the public, the municipality abandons it. By including the public into the affairs and decisions of the municipality, the public began to regard the municipality as their own, argues the councilors.

Especially in Van, assemblies are not functional as the councilors wish them to be. In Diyarbakir, the councilors underline that assemblies are well functioning. There is literally very little attention due to the fear of persecution. I still believe that despite their shortcomings, assemblies need mentioning because, firstly, they appeared in the interviews without asking and secondly because of the undertones of need for participatory mechanisms. Why are BDP activists emphasizing the issue of participation?

Linking Trajectories with Civic and Urban Demands

In the previous chapter, I argued that the politicizing effect of seeing, witnessing and experiencing the conflict, adapting to new political economy in the urban localities after immigration or displaced and the experience of collectively urbanizing are the basis of reasons and motivating factors that led BDP's local actors to mobilize municipalities. These experiences dwell on the hardships faced in the cities which are related to problems of shelter, infrastructure and unemployment. In this subsection, I link these arguments on trajectories with civic and urban demands.

In the 1990's the persecution of Kurdish identity and its cultural recognition and representation suppressed the voices of the displaced Kurdish peasants, especially that of women. The already present organization of activists that followed

the political tradition of HEP was able to communicate with the displaced; both politically organizing them and socially including them into urban spaces where their cultural diversity and heritage have been appreciated. This formed bonds between activists and urban poor. The urban poor began organizing politically from the grassroots voicing the popular demands of the urbanized Kurdish peasantry.

With the end of the extra juridical activities of the state's counter insurgency teams, the political mobilization of the urbanized Kurdish identity became successful in local elections to win offices within municipalities. The political aspirations of these municipalities thus involved solving urban problems and civic issues. The civic issues have been most salient in the effort of municipalities to stamp their urban localities with their diversified backgrounds which had been defied and persecuted by the state since the formation of the republic. The grassroots of BDP which is composed of the newly urbanized Kurdish identity, establishing a podium to be heard came to merge its political and economic demands with social claims which made no distinction between civic demands of equality and justice with urban demands of service delivery. Thus there is a strong link between life trajectories and civic and urban demands of BDP.

The demands of Kurdish Movement on the national arena since HEP was formed in the parliament have not changed: end to the armed conflict, cultural rights of Kurdish people secured with a new constitution. Since 2009, the project of Democratic Autonomy⁶³ is added to these demands, which reiterates the previous demands and demands for administrative subsidiarity, a just national distribution of wealth and strengthening of local institutions, as revealed above.

⁶³ Demokratik Özerklik Projesi [The Project of Democratic Autonomy]. Retrieved August 1, 2012 from www.bdp.org.tr/index.php/tr/demokratik-ozerklik-projesi.

Democratic Autonomy by itself has very little meaning and since there is no application or recognition thus it cannot be observed. Its content yet remains to be determined through public debate and negotiation. The declaration indicates three main political aspects: (i) critiquing Turkish state formation and modernization, (ii) proposing for constitutional changes, and (iii), declaring that BDP will autonomously continue organizing local bodies to achieve the ends in the proposal. The third aspect is under scrutiny here because according to the interviewees, with the project of Democratic Autonomy each home is being connected to the municipality through neighborhood assemblies.

The councilors regard Democratic Autonomy as a political reform that recognizes a political status for Kurds and their claim to self-determination (*öz yönetim* and *kendi kendini yönetme*). However self-determination in its use is not equal to right to nation-state. It is a legitimate administrative reform for the nation with similar applications in the world. In this sense, it is decentralization of all competences of the centralized state. Self-determination is thus articulated as devolution of tutelage apparatus of the state to regional bodies.

There is also the geostrategic argument that Turkey is too big to be centralized and bureaucracy in Ankara fails drastically to grasp their situation. Planning should be localized and administrative decision should be regional, not central. Most importantly, no appointed actors should be able to exercise tutelage arbitrarily. All these propositions are defended on the grounds of democracy and strengthening state-society relations, as one councilor in Van stated: “a strong state cannot forge a strong society, but an organized society can forge a stronger state.”

In this sense, Democratic Autonomy is envisioned to reorganize societal relations through increase in participatory mechanisms linking people to local

institutions and government. This allows better projection of people's will and improves service capacities of local institutions making them more accountable, responsive and project oriented. With the decrease of power hold of local elites, tribes and appointed actors, neighborhood councils and city councils are supposed to function to inform local government and curb fraud and embezzlement of public funds.

Strengthening of local apparatuses and participatory mechanisms are also considered to decrease economic dependency to supra-local factors. Communal economies where public utility would prevail over profit are also the historical and traditional way communities in the Region had lived. This is also supposed to be ecologically sensitive to urban issues.

Overall, there are also inconsistent accounts among councilors and confusions about certain details especially over economic matters. Councilors believe that the project would unite the nation and that the movement has been unnecessarily criminalized in the media. And some councilors argue that through municipalities they are already in the process of constructing their project – or I would say that they see geographies of resistance as construing local autonomy; which again relates to the third aspect of the project.

All the definitions and attributes of the project of Democratic Autonomy, as stated by the interviewed councilors show two simultaneous issues regarding the link between their life trajectories and civic and urban demands and why local politics became central for the movement. First, the project is defended in terms of solving the conflict by resolving what they deem to be problematic in Turkey and what caused the conflict in the first place – in terms of appeasing identity and cultural grievances. Second, it is being discussed in the sphere of countering the negative

effects of the conflict, uneven development and especially neoliberal interventions which are articulated in terms of the failure of centralized state apparatus to bring development – in terms of appeasing civic and urban grievances. Both issues are directly related to the life stories of the interviewed councilors.

Countering Neoliberalism

Brenner and Theodore argue that “local (and regional) spaces are now increasingly being viewed as key institutional arenas for a wide range of policy experiments and political strategies” (2002: 341). This may not be surprising since institutions emanating from neoliberal ideology since the 1970s have attempted to bring various solutions to problems of underdevelopment and poverty and depoliticizing these issues (Das 2004: 4923); they, however, have failed. In a certain ironic sense, the undertone of this statement implies that neoliberal ideology’s last resort to deliver its promises is now local rejuvenation from below.

The core principles and outcomes of neoliberalism are generally regarded “as the loosening or dismantling of the various institutional constraints upon marketization, commodification, the hyperexploitation of workers, and the discretionary power of private capital” (Brenner and Theodore 2002: 342). Seeing that many policy makers take these aspects of neoliberalism as inevitable, Brenner and Theodore locate a paradox:

Paradoxically, much of the contemporary political appeal to the “local” actually rests upon arguments regarding allegedly uncontrollable supralocal transformations, such as globalization, the financialization of capital, the erosion of the national state, and the intensification of interspatial competition. Under these conditions, in the absence of a sustainable regulatory fix at global, supranational, or national scales, localities are increasingly being viewed as the only remaining institutional arenas in which

a negotiated form of capitalist regulation might be forged (Brenner and Theodore 2002: 341).

What is indeed a negotiated form of a capitalist regulation? Which parties negotiate this regulation? What are the actual spaces and institutions at localities that this negotiation takes place? And finally, what sorts of social and political mechanisms prevail to sustain the terms of this negotiation?

I argue that even though critiques of neoliberalism offer sound analytical tools and invoke a rich research agenda, they are limited to take into account the local agency in establishing the terms of this negotiation. I assert that neoliberal agenda rubs its ‘contradictory nature’ off to local agency especially in case where local agency operates within a popular social movement. In this sense, I suggest that social movements mobilizing in urban localities with popular compositions, and in this case with the degree of local power, should be examined in terms of countering and localizing neoliberalism. My situation is parallel to Kingfisher and Maskovsky’s proposal for cultural anthropology and their insistence “on not using the term as if it explains anything in and of itself, and rather to treat it as something that needs to be explained in particular places and with reference to particular peoples, territories, states and cultural formations” (2009: 123-124).

Three items of neoliberal agenda in Turkey affect urban localities and local governments the most: “reorganization of social welfare promoting workfare over welfare (Çoşar and Yeğenoğlu 2009: 39), structurally forcing flexible employment through tenders (Kadirbeyoğlu and Sümer *forthcoming*) and growth-first” approach to urban development (Peck and Tickell 2002: 394) through construction business.

Workfare over welfare on the other hand places more roles to charity networks organized through municipalities and governorships. Çoşar and Yeğenoğlu argue that “works of charity, colored with Muslim sentiments, are both in line with

the neoliberal mentality and more profitable politically” (2009: 47). Especially in cases of AKP municipalities, this is called social municipalism (*sosyal belediyecilik*) (Aydın 2008).

The growth-first approach to urban development through construction business is both carried out by TOKİ and private contractors whom enjoy the increased competences of municipalities in the matter. The increased competences of the municipalities convey the local actors to develop more land while enforcing zoning plans and to create conditions for a profitable real-estate market. On the other hand, TOKİ carries out large scale urban development projects, similar to its counterparts in Europe (Swyngedouw et al 2002: 542), employing market logic for social housing projects more than welfare principles. In this sense, urban development is seen as extracting value from cities and their expansion (Weber 2002: 519).

However I do not aim to discuss my observations on the matter of urban development for two reasons: first, they do not inform us on countering neoliberalism; second, observations and findings parallel to my own have been discussed elaborately by Yüksel (2011). She shows how “space has become an ‘instrument’ for not only the Turkish state, but also various actors including Kurdish political movement and local businessmen through which future projections and meanings of life are contested and deliberated” (2011: 437). As such, I have come to observe that Kurdish actors tend to contribute to the localization of neoliberal modes of urban expansion mainly because the amount of wealth produced helps them to compete politically with their main contender AKP in terms of delivering services. I would like to keep my focus on countering neoliberal interventions while construing the project of Democratic Autonomy. But I must underline that most of the activist

based criticism in Diyarbakir, and also in Van, stems from the policies of urban development of Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality.

In the rest of this subsection, I elaborate how Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality rolls into the sphere of welfare while setting example for Van and I delineate how flexible labor regime is utilized by both Diyarbakir and Van municipalities. In the last part, I look into intramunicipal coordination spearheaded by the municipal administration in Diyarbakir since 2005 to look into larger picture of countering neoliberalism.

Rolling Into the Sphere of Welfare

Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality founded Sarmaşık Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Development Foundation in 2007 to map poverty and develop social projects to alleviate its effects. The project of the foundation that is regarded to have the greatest success is Food Bank (*Gıda Bankası*). The project brought together local business people, civil society organizations and NGO's as partners with the municipality to "offer direct assistance through contemporary and just means to citizens residing in Diyarbakir and having difficulty in obtaining basic nourishment."⁶⁴

After seeing its success in providing certain welfare services, in Batman and Van similar foundations have been established as well with the same project. But they are not still as effective as the foundation in Diyarbakir. Sarmaşık is a very compelling case to understand how welfare is regarded by the movement.

⁶⁴ "Diyarbakır'da ikamet eden ve temel gıda maddelerini karşılamakta güçlük çeken yoksul yurttaşlarımıza çağdaş ve adil yöntemlerle gıda yardımında bulunmak." Retrieved June 25, 2012 from www.sarmasik.org/Default.aspx?ctrl=d&gurupid=gidabankasi&id=gidabankasiprojesi.

Upon determination of need by the social workers of the municipality, each needy party receives ten lira support for each member of the family from the Food Bank. The content of the assistance is not determined or delivered to needy; the person who is receiving the assistance comes down the Food Bank each month and shops according to the amount of allocated assistance. Each food item bears a price tag and the receiver determines the type and amount of nutritive supplements in line with the budget.

Almost all of the people receiving the assistance are women. A social worker told me “women seem to find their way here easily, tell others and get out of their homes.” In this way, the project alleviates feminization of poverty and curbs domestic repression of women. And the principle of the project, as the social worker tells me, is not about giving alms and expecting gratitude; people receiving assistance do not feel undignified and are not forced upon a predetermined package which may not actually be needed by them.

After I returned from Diyarbakir to Istanbul, I was shopping at a supermarket. Before me in the cashier line, a woman was struggling to limit the bill to forty liras. She had to decide whether she wanted the cheese or sausages so that she could pay. I observed the uneasiness of the woman being watched by many spectators in the line. She was going to pay with assistance checks distributed by Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality that can only be cashed at partner supermarket chains.

The difference between both cases was astonishing. Through this comparison, I was able to see the project at Diyarbakir better. The space designed by Sarmaşık is aimed at allowing receivers take the process at their own paces. The receivers interact with social workers; not sellers and cashiers. The partners and contributors of the project and the receivers do not meet; they are unknown to each other. Sarmaşık

buys the goods from wholesale producers and cuts costs. The logic of welfare is not about shopping from market or supplying everything necessary; it is supplementary to market consumption but not taking the place of market relations.

Sarmaşık foundation does not go without state repression. One of its social workers, a woman from Trabzon was arrested while I was doing my fieldwork. Before, the governorship wanted the lists, addresses and names of people receiving assistance but the municipality denied. The audits and court appeals of the governor continue. Its presence and activities are regarded as “helping terrorists,” as articulated by local members of AKP to the media.

Sarmaşık offers a mean-tested assistance to the urban poor and neediness is determined in terms of lack of workfare and degree of the effect of the war. Thus most of the receivers are women, who have lost husbands or male relatives to the war and forcibly displaced. I do not suggest that the policy of the foundation is based on determining this population but that the composition of the urban poor in Diyarbakir is in fact this population. The success of the municipality to bring together the multiplicity of urban actors of middle and upper middle class is linked with the movement’s popular composition. It is how one of the ways through which the retrenchment of social welfare state that was almost never constituted in the Region is countered.

Adapting to Flexible Labor Market

In Diyarbakir, more than fifteen hundred workers with provisional yearly contracts who are paid minimum wage are employed by firms who are undertaking contracts from the municipality. In Van the number is around six hundred but they are

employed through the parastatal firm Mavikent owned by the municipality. But in Diyarbakir, more than twenty locally based firms get these contracts annually and employ the same workers. What is striking is that the number of workers employed by these private firms amounts to three times as much as municipal employees with full benefits job security whose overall payroll is exact to 30 percent of the annual budget.

What makes Diyarbakir metropolitan municipality a compelling case is the political will of the office of the mayor to strictly regulate the labor conditions for workers with provisional contracts. The administration restructured a branch functioning under the mayor's office – Branch of Services Procurement (*Hizmet Alımı İşlemleri Şubesi*). As opposed to its counterparts and Human Resources Department, that is only responsible for municipal employees with full benefits, this branch works only on the issues of workers with provisional contracts and follows, checks and sanctions the firms that are undertaking the contracts. The department makes sure workers are re-employed at the end of contracts or when another firm gets the contract from the municipality. The department dictates conditions of employment through a means-tested approach. The social workers of the municipality coordinate with the department to determine whether any future provisional employee is in need of a job because they have been gravely affected by the Kurdish conflict. In a way, the structural flexibility of the labor market is voluntarily fixed and secured for workers by the administration through clauses in contracts and checks; even though such endeavor is neither compulsory nor encouraged. In Van, this takes place without supervision since Mavikent is directly administered by the municipality.

The person who runs the department since its foundation is a Human Rights Activist who also worked with Baydemir at İHD. The local actors of BDP bring an innovative approach to solving urban problems exacerbated by the Kurdish conflict. In this picture, the municipality becomes a central actor negotiating regulation of market relations and determining the extent of surplus of the service sector, as a legitimate administration and legal institution. The neoliberal item of flexible labor market becomes a subject for the social and political ideals of the movements. And the local offices are utilized as mechanisms to sustain these ideals.

I am told that the municipality has to employ workers through contracting firms for daily services; the amount resources allocated and revenues collected are not enough to employ enough personnel to undertake all services. But there is an extent to which they can determine how this outsourcing could be made. Fifteen hundred workers is an insignificant number compared to overall population of Diyarbakir however considering the high rates of unemployment the municipality is an important employer. This could have allowed the municipality to not check and pursue its contractors and further lower the costs of tender. But this is not the path chosen. Effects of neoliberal transformation is countered with mean-tested approaches to welfare and workfare, and made more bearable and socially stable for the people. Thus the municipalities are facing to institute relations of labor against their principles, forcing them to live in contradictory conditions.

Political Constraints in the Era of Neoliberalism

One of the development policies which prevail during Turkey's accession to the EU is the funds made available by the EU for local governments. Diyarbakir

metropolitan municipality was able to use these funds to its advantage but after 2009 the government stipulated that each project should be ratified by the ministries before being submitted. This has ended the access of BDP run municipalities to these funds. In a parallel vein, BDP's local actors told me that their municipalities cannot access to funds of other state institutions which arbitrarily denies their projects. The same holds true for the arbitrary refusal to allow the metropolitan municipality to own and utilize a parastatal company.

When *Torba Yasa* passed, municipalities in Diyarbakir were hopeful that they would be getting rid of a "burden" that was caused by RP administrations in the 1990s. During the interviews, the councilors stated that "a photo mailed with a copy of the identity" was enough to get employed in the 1990s because favoritism went unchecked. Thus, except for Kayapınar, all municipalities had excess number of personnel which had been employed and not paid for a long time when the movement took over the municipalities.

The administration prepared the list of personnel that were willing to relocate at other institutions. Their pensions were secured with loans. But the governor only relocated one fifth of the total number of personnel in these lists. The metropolitan municipality was not affected much but central district municipalities of Yenışehir and Sur were gravely disappointed. They argue that the governor acted unlawful and also prioritized AKP run municipalities in Diyarbakir while other governors in the Region have done the same.

When I heard the councilors criticizing the governor for not applying a law that has been criticized and opposed by all unions in Turkey for not respecting worker's rights, I was puzzled. I did not intervene during the interviews and attempted to understand the core of their argument and the institutional context. They

said as the administration they basically have to get rid of this burden that impedes their capacity to deliver services and that reminds them of favoritism of the past. This is their public duty.

Firstly, I want to assert that some aspects of neoliberal agenda, such as access to international funds and decrease of wage expenditure, are hindered for the benefit of BDP. The local actors underline that these are in fact designs of AKP to obstruct BDP. But is it not problematic to feel that BDP is left out of neoliberal agenda of AKP while the party principles in fact position itself ideationally in New Left movements and against neoliberalism?

This is where the contradiction arises but not felt because of the harsh reality of things. In this sense, the concept public duty is invoked. Public duty does not have a rigid definition. Especially when administrating municipalities, it is about positioning the municipality and its resources to maximize service delivery capacity. Public duty is the end and means are amorphous. And overall, what are left as experiences are more coercive interventions than neoliberal interventions.

Cooperation and Coordination of Municipalities since 2004: GABB

South East Anatolian Municipalities Union (GABB) was established in 1991 but it was not until 2004 that it became an important actor in the Region. Baydemir administration took the initiative to transform the union into a working organization. The situation of the union before 2004 was described to me as lacking even the personnel to carry out resignation notices of the member municipalities. The political climate and social changes also had their part in providing a structure to make possible regional cooperation and cooperation among municipalities. Mostly, the

decrease in the severity of the conflict helped elevating these links. This subsection bears substantial findings about mobilization of municipalities by BDP, which fall on the periphery of provinces of Diyarbakir and Van and but greatly informs more on the mobilization of municipalities and countering neoliberalism.

When Baydemir administration decided to revive the union, there was a large debt and shortage of employees. Thirty municipalities were members of GABB. Baydemir reached local public notables to convince mayors to join in their endeavor. The union is the biggest shareholder of a private firm, BİLYAP that was in debt in 2004. The other shareholder is Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality. Presently, the union has hundred and eighteen members.⁶⁵ The union has a regional character and includes member municipalities administered by AKP and CHP (Republican People's Party) as well. It is based in Diyarbakir. Biannually, an executive committee is elected among mayors and the committee convenes monthly. It is not uncommon for a mayor affiliated with AKP or CHP to become a member of the executive committee. The union is presided by Baydemir but the secretary runs the daily duties. The budget exceeds six million Turkish Liras. The union employs forty people working under departments of Survey and Project Development, Foreign Relations, Editorial, Fiscal, Strategic Planning, Legal and Media. Some of the employees and members of the executive committee were imprisoned allegedly for being members of KCK.

There are three functions of the union worth elaborating: resource redistribution, lobbying, and strategy development. These functions are handled by Survey and Project Development, Foreign Relations and Strategic Planning Departments. I interviewed three people working for the union. Two of them worked

⁶⁵ Information on the union is available online. Retrieved June 20, 2012 from www.gabb.gov.tr.

in the Survey and Project Development Department. And the other employee I interviewed had been the secretary of the union since 2004 but recently self-demoted to Foreign Relations Department. I gained insights on the functions of the union and asked in detail about the three functions I deemed compelling for this study. I do not disclose the identities of interviewees with respect to the findings presented.

In Van or Diyarbakir it is less likely to see the personnel of the union undertaking a project. This is mainly due to the fact that both municipalities can afford to have the necessary personnel for basic service delivery. But other smaller municipalities with large personnel budgets and very little income have great difficulties to employ personnel or contract out projects. These difficulties presents themselves even in the most basic services such as providing public toilets, firefighting stations or building playgrounds. The union personnel seeks localities with urgent needs to these services and plans strategically how their sustenance could be incorporated to the budget or undertaken by the municipality's resources. The union not only receives precise demands but also examines certain localities to determine if there is a need in terms of ecological and gender issues and intramunicipal cooperation. These three sensitivities developed in the Region through BDP's principles of local administrations and the project of Democratic Autonomy.

The union receives 0.1 percent of the overall budget of each municipality for membership fee. This sum that is collected from the municipalities are used for necessary projects as determined according to need or inspection from GABB personnel, and redistributed to carry out these projects. The forty percent of the whole budget of the union is used for redistributive purposes. This renders the union as a quasi-redistributive regional agent. It accomplishes on a regional scale what a

social welfare state intends to do on a national scale. The fact that disposition of resources is based on principles that target at the disadvantageous sectors of the society and unevenly developed due to geographical disparity perpetuated by capitalist accumulation is quite unorthodox. This finding, among others, was one of the most astounding findings for me throughout this research. It is an example of how imagined geography of coherence is employed to deliver services in order to mitigate negative effects of the dependence relations. Cities working together to boost municipal collaboration is indeed defended by neoliberals but to an end that ensures cities can better compete with other (Dachis 2010). However in this case, cities are working together to reverse the outcomes of uneven geographical development.

I illustrate this finding with a couple of examples from my interviews. Sason is a rural district of Batman where many villages are dependent on for purchases, health care and other administrative needs. Villagers in the wider area of the district commute to the town center to undertake these chores and necessities. The town center lacked a public restroom for women until recently. The union took on the initiative, developed the project and funded the building of a public restroom for women whose daily commutes had been toilsome due to lack of services. This shows that, firstly, male-oriented approach in planning and secondly, the union figures out service duties which a functioning state should determine the need for and act upon. The union also brought in the support of the syndicate of municipal workers into the picture.

The union brings together civil society, NGO, unions and other community organizing into undertaking these projects and raises the level of participation. The campaign “Orada Bir *Belde* Var Uzakta” (There is a Town in the Horizon) is an

example to these efforts. The rhetoric of the name of the campaign is quite interesting because it imitates a popular kindergarten song “Orada Bir Köy Var Uzakta” (There is a *Village* in the Horizon). The emphasis on the town, being as a relatively small urban center in dire need of attention to rally support is an indicator that urban development has become a central concern that also permeates with these subtle messages. One of the fifty three projects undertaken under this campaign involves building the first playground for children in the city center of Şırnak in 2007. I previously elaborated how Şırnak became a province and the military strategy behind it. The union acts to render these places as *actual urban spaces* as opposed to military garrisons. In comparison to the security incentives of the state, the union brings a vision of civic and humane urban localities for urban spaces affected to the highest degree during the peak of the conflict.

One of the central duties of municipalities in Turkey is to form fire brigades and prepare for natural disaster relief efforts. Most urban localities in the Region lacked the capacity to provide these services. The union helped set up fire brigades in several districts and raised awareness in others in order to prepare for natural disaster relief efforts. The aftermath of the earthquake in Van, I believe, revealed that the capacity of municipalities combined in the Region is still far from providing professional relief effort. However the mobilization towards disaster relief and the conviction of the need are present. In the winter of 2011 following the earthquake, many tents burned down killing mostly children due to wrong use of heating. As of February, eleven people had died in the fires according to media reports.⁶⁶ In order to prevent the deaths, using its own resources, the union produced instructive pamphlets explaining how to avoid conflagration and how to escape fire. I was told that the

⁶⁶ 11 can gitti, daha kaç kişi yanacak? [11 lives gone, how much more will burn] Retrieved June 25, 2012 from www.yuksekovahaber.com/haber/11-can-gitti,-daha-kac-kisi-yanacak-65927.htm.

pamphlets stopped the fires. The informant showed me the pamphlet which was a hand sketch with guidelines. The caricatures depicted a nucleus family with traditional Kurdish clothes. I conducted the interview in March and I did not encounter any reports of tent fires after February.

How can the state consistently disregard and not act upon deaths caused by wrong use of basic heating items? The fact that since the forced displacement state institutions in the Region have never developed social and welfare capabilities once again surfaced in this single example. This example also reveals that there is no agency on behalf of the state which is involved in partaking in social initiatives. When an agency is actually involved, like in this case with the union, cultural imprint of Kurdish identity is also present.

The last example is about an undergoing project in Muş. The provincial municipality of Muş is neither administered by BDP nor is a member of the union. However there are eleven town and district municipalities in Muş belonging to the union and are presided by BDP. These towns and districts are relatively close and geographically situated on a plain which makes transportation easier. The project aims to bring together the work vehicles of all municipalities under one parking lot and coordinate the work for all. The purpose is to lower the costs by sharing the heavy duty machinery which is expensive for a single town municipality to purchase or rent in the long run.

The last function of the union is lobbying nationally and internationally. The department works as if Foreign Ministry of the Region. It seeks representation and recognition of cultural and political claims of the municipalities in the Region and establishes international solidarity networks. Nationwide, the union was able to snatch two chairs in the executive committee of the union of municipalities of

Turkey and a member in the delegation of Local Governments. Also, the union has lobbied for the passing of a law regarding Municipal Unions to establish their competences. Through this law, the union obtained the status of being a “regional union” and to be represented with secretary general.

Internationally, the efforts of the department and especially Baydemir’s work allowed Kadir Topbaş, the mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality to be elected as the president of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). And Baydemir became the co-president of Middle East and West Asia Section (UCLG-MAWA). I know for a fact from the delegation of Van who travelled to Mexico in 2010 was asked to vote for the presidency of Topbaş by AKP mayors who also attended the summit. In return, Baydemir’s candidationship for co-presidency was supported. The cooperation of AKP and BDP mayors on the international arena is quite surprising considering the unceasing tension between the two parties in the national politics. These events also underpin the political reality in Turkey based on the significance of local governments.

Another example of through international structures, Kurdish movement extended ties of solidarity. Baydemir, speaking upon a visit of delegation of an Iraqi indigenous tribe told this to the media:

We are strongly against the collection of water in dams to be used to politically blackmail peoples of the Middle East. Thus our stance and perspective is different from the government.⁶⁷

GABB has made itself an important actor in the Region for providing necessary visions regarding urban development for member municipalities. The changes in the political climate and the initiative of Baydemir’s administration allowed this to be realized. The union began providing perspectives for urban

⁶⁷ Su Bedevileri Baydemir’den destek istedi [Water Bedouins demanded solidarity from Baydemir], Retrieved June 25, 2012 from www.diyarbakir-bld.gov.tr/newsdetails.aspx?ID=5735&natid=0.

development especially in deprived and war-torn localities where services that the state is supposed to deliver has been rolling out. These perspectives have been utilizing schemas close to fundamentals of neoliberal good governance (Toksöz 2008)⁶⁸ however in their core provided ecological and gender oriented outlook that sought disadvantageous communities and unevenly developed localities. The fundamentals of neoliberal governance in this sense are civil society participation, intramunicipal cooperation and local elite coordination to flourish economic rejuvenation from below. The form of their application through the union, however, proved to be intrinsically diverted from the neoliberal maxim: free market and capitalist accumulation. I assert the union acts like a quasi-social and welfare state that redistributes resources towards historically disadvantaged, reaches out to marginalized localities and develops a foreign/exterior policy agenda on behalf of defended social and political grievances of the Region.

GABB works outside BDP and its branch on local governments. Even though it is based in Diyarbakir, the conducted work is not in Diyarbakir and seldom in the city center of Van. This is because both municipalities have their own resources and capabilities and wishes to keep their autonomy.

GABB has rolled into spheres that the neoliberal state has rolled out however pursuing an agenda opposite to the maxims of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism in the region has been dominantly instituted as destruction; the creative aspects of neoliberal interventions have been long delayed. This is related to the fact that the Region had been governed like a semi-colony under state of exception for too long. With the relaxation of the mode of governing, the actors in the Region mobilized an unprecedented local regional network in the history of modern Turkey; a body that

⁶⁸ I assert that Good Governance is a maxim of neoliberal local government agenda. TESEV as a leading think-tank organization provides publications on the issue for local governments.

seeks and establishes international contacts without being accountable to Turkey's foreign policy. I locate the historically specific aspect of GABB in representing a large network of local actors in a region with demands of autonomy.

I examined how intramunicipal cooperation and collaboration evolved in the Region since 2004. These examinations and discussion informed in which ways and around what kinds of policies the perspectives of the movement on local government tend to be materialized. In case of GABB, the examples pertained to the localities. In fact these localities happen to be situated in the periphery of Diyarbakir and Van. There is a complex web of interdependence in the Region, which I elaborated previously. The activists of the movement were able to utilize these webs of interdependence to mobilize municipalities incrementally in parallel to changing political circumstances.

Conclusion

This chapter addressed the question on how these municipalities are organized and mobilized within the context of the conflict and neoliberalism. In addition, the answer to how they would be mobilized and local politics would be constituted without political constraints and neoliberal interventions also appeared.

In terms of how municipalities are mobilized, three categories of politics and demands stand out: identity politics, civic and urban demands. These politics and demands make a dialectic relationship between grassroots and activists. I presented these categories to understand both actions of activists where demands of grassroots are voiced and undertaken.

Identity politics refers to the demands of the movement at the national scale ranging from the solution of the conflict to recognition of cultural rights of Kurds and these demands have led to the articulation of Democratic Autonomy. Specific actions of the movement cultivate Kurdish identity and groupness which are happening at the local level. The municipalities expend resources and utilize capabilities to create an urban context for these demands and the reflection of these practices falls where Kurdish groupness in the cities is spatially reproduced. Civic issues are based on public participation; urban issues are technical requirements for basic services. Identity issues are fundamentally different yet related to urban and civic issues in terms of how their appeasement is reproduced.

In terms of physical production of urban space, the movement was able to address civic and urban grievances. Identity politics and civic and urban demands came together in reproducing urban space. There is an established link between politics and demands; and how they constitute each other have political significance for the aspirations of the local actors.

As a result of the intensity of the dialectic relationship between grassroots and activists, participation became a topic on how to mobilize local governments. The issue of participation became important to increase information from the grassroots, strengthen grassroots mobilization and implement the project of Democratic Autonomy. The project is defended in terms of solving the conflict by resolving what Kurdish actors see as problematic in Turkey. More importantly, the project is being discussed in the sphere of countering the negative effects of the conflict, uneven development and neoliberal interventions. These are articulated in terms of the failure of centralized state apparatus to bring development.

In the light of these actions and interactions, the project of Democratic Autonomy becomes more central to the identity, civic and urban demands of the movement. It is the proposal of local actors, enriched with their experience in local offices to both solve the conflict and bring the modernization and development to the Region which the centralized state and its appointed actors and local alliances failed to bring. As a researcher, I believe the statements of the local actors and their elaborations on this project have more political significance since the project itself purports that at the local level Democratic Autonomy would be constituted.

Lastly, in terms of the neoliberal context, there are two issues at hand: first, the reforms within Democratic Autonomy are being articulated in terms of countering neoliberal interventions. And the field work and ethnographic observations suggest that in spheres where the neoliberal interventions of the central state allow Kurdish actors leverage, the municipalities are mobilized to counter the effects of neoliberalism.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis is my pursuit of learning more about local politics, social movements and neoliberalism. It is an ethnographic testimony of the municipalities run by BDP and political demands that become the reason for persecution. I think that my findings, arguments and conclusions deriving from my micro level engagement within a prolonged period of time are relevant to macro level political process. I find that it is my moral imperative that I do justice and reveal my sincere conclusions of their political mobilization during the age of neoliberalism.

This thesis studied a dynamic that has not been empirically investigated. Kurdish actors operating under Kurdish movement and mobilizing municipalities have been examined through numerous studies. However why local politics became central for Kurdish movement through the life trajectories and political struggles of the local actors and in what ways this is related to how these municipalities are mobilized has not been researched. The novelty of this research lies in seeking an answer to the question of where projects and reform demands of Kurdish movement stem.

The argument of the thesis is that local politics became central to Kurdish actors because the experience in mobilizing municipalities has given them the opportunity to address grievances – mostly which stemmed from to the conflict and the project of Democratic Autonomy has given them a field in which how they want to mobilize local governments could be articulated and would be constituted. In this

sense, Kurdish movement as a popular urban social movement is situated against the ill-effects of neoliberalism and is mindful of the conflict and would like to determine the collective consumption at the local and regional level through participatory mechanisms to counter problems induced by both contexts.

With regard to Kurdish Movement as represented in the sphere of electoral politics by BDP, I discovered that the party welcomes people of diverse backgrounds affected by all aspects of the conflict. This allows for the cultivation of a political subjectivity under its umbrella. Through this political subjectivity, Kurdish movement counters the hegemony of the state machinery and maintains a resilient electoral and cadre base.

The political subjectivity of the local actors of BDP is based on collective formulation of material interest which is derived from multiplicity of personal motivating factors and the motivating factors and reasons stemming from personal experience. I locate an ongoing dialectic between these two bases which suggests that BDP continues to be a grassroots and popular mobilization.

The predominant motivating factor for persons to participate in BDP is related to their experience with the conflict. I illustrated how this experience becomes a politicizing effect. Most importantly, for municipal councilors this experience is directly articulated with the experience of collectively urbanizing. This suggests that for local actors of BDP, urbanization has become a central political topic. The importance of this topic is that BDP is politicizing spheres that neoliberals are purporting to depoliticize and handle in the sphere of expertise.

Politicization of urbanization has found ramifications in identity, urban and civic demands of BDP. The municipalities began designing urban space that

addresses demands. The fact that these demands converged suggests that identity claims and social justice demands cannot be regarded separately.

This suggests that urban politics of BDP allow the newly urbanized Kurdish population to remake their encounter with modernity while reevaluating their exposure to it. The experience of local actors of BDP with the state machinery after working as municipal councilors became an important pivotal point for providing content for the project of Democratic Autonomy. In this sense, local actors of BDP began identifying themselves as legitimate actors with better, novel and humane projects to serve people through the state machinery. Their criticism is not only based on the repressive use of the state machinery but also policies that further exacerbate conditions of the urban poor and uneven geographic development. This indicates that the central agenda of neoliberalism is a political problem and supports the claim of the party's ideational opposition to neoliberalism.

Paradoxically, certain aspects of neoliberal agenda that are obstructed for the benefit of BDP run municipalities are also a basis of their critiques. In this sense, BDP's local actors lack a fixed stance against neoliberal agenda for local governments. This is the result of two issues: first, the movement cannot undertake the realization of radical economical transformations rapidly; second, the impending needs for urban service delivery forces the actors to work within a neoliberal framework. However the leeway of this framework is also utilized to counter further affecting the popular strata. I realized that this leeway is utilized because BDP continues to hold onto its social movement background. In this sense, the repercussions of neoliberal agenda are only countered when political accountability becomes entangled with grassroots mobilization.

The necessity of submerging within the current framework of local development is better understood when the urban conditions of Diyarbakir and Van are contextualized within a path dependent trajectory. Steering the wheel of the municipalities that were irresponsibly administered prior to their mobilization by BDP is the most entrenched outcome of neoliberalism of the 1990s in Turkey. Thus, for BDP being situated against patronage and clientalism became a political necessity for survival more than a principle. This is also due to the fact that urbanization became a political issue for the displaced peasantry.

However the fact that the metropolitan municipality has joined the macro trend of urban development trajectory of Turkey shows the limits of a social movement to transform its locality as per its ideals; especially in spheres where central government directly intervenes and enforces. Further examination of this engagement revealed that, especially in Diyarbakir, the metropolitan municipality becomes more attached to neoliberal practices in spheres where it enjoys full competence. This has been a critical juncture for the movement in mobilizing municipalities and the actions of the administration received critical response from activists of the movement in other spheres. This shows that the metropolitan municipality began functioning further from the activist spheres and grassroots.

Despite the convergence of these practices with neoliberal agenda on this particular issue, local actors of BDP still regard AKP in the Region as what they are not. AKP is both the state and the political party in this sense. And this is the basis of a political discord between them in two levels: first, AKP is a fundamentally different political tradition whose policies reinforce regional disparities; second, AKP as the state holds the power to determine resource allocation that rejects to allow local actors in the Region to administer these resources.

This discord creates a political deadlock for two reasons. Firstly, the state is still reactionary to the presence of Kurdish identity. Secondly, the state is against all demands of regional autonomy. Both these reasons are parallel with the lack of social justice as envisioned by BDP.

The source of conflict between demands of Kurds in the sphere of culture and identity with the state and AKP government is historical. PKK defines its breakaway from Turkish Left on the basis of delaying to address Kurds' grievances. HEP broke away from SHP because nationalists and supporters of Kemalist modernization within SHP lines are reactionary towards Kurdish demands. As such, Kurdish movement always retained a leftist tradition more which has not only been distant to nationalism and Kemalism in Turkey but also to traditionalist and conservative politics. The political traditions of Kurdish movement and AKP are not reconcilable in this respect.

The municipalities run by BDP in the cities of the Region struggle in the sphere of culture and identity to both resist the past and produce the present. The municipalities defend the cultural demands of its grassroots in the political sphere and regulate the labor relations. BDP not only opposes AKP's political stance in terms of identity, but also in terms of political economy. Most significant opposition of BDP is that the party is against the flow of resources from periphery to center; from rural and less urbanized provinces to metropolitan zones. Alongside the demand for progressive redistribution of national wealth, the party is also against building of hydroelectric dams and undertaking mega development projects. These principles of the party appear in their political statements, intramunicipal networks and at grassroots protests.

Yet there is a limit to this contention in terms of political economy, as certain benefits of the neoliberal local agenda of AKP are reaped for service delivery. However, since BDP is holding identity, rights and constitutional demands higher than its adherence to a radical political economy project; upon the constitution of the prior demands, BDP's current composition of local actors are inclined to delay the latter.

These conclusions are the results of my micro level engagement with a social movement over a prolonged period of time. As such, I also have few conclusions important for the methods of political science.

First, I have benefited largely from conducting the fieldwork half way between two local elections periods. In this sense, I assert that in order to analyze better why certain actors pursue electoral politics, the variable of election period should be controlled. Even though, the fieldwork overlapped with general elections, the issue did not blur the narratives because I waited for the election fever to pass.

Second, social movements mobilize, organize and demand during long periods of time. It would not be reasonable to follow the whole process in order to investigate them; however long term engagement is necessary in order to map out complexities, grasp contradictions and determine motivations. Social movements produce their own language, terms and geographies and in order to understand the rationality and logic of movements; these cultural productions must be approached with ethnographic and democratic sensitivities. This may mean going over length, constructing tiresome narratives and analysis against parsimonious models however political ethnography of mass mobilization would not otherwise inform about important macro events.

Third, neoliberalism is a phenomenon under study of all disciplines of social sciences which makes it hard to contextualize with respect the discipline at hand. Especially for research with fieldwork on neoliberalism, I suggest that perspectives of all available disciplines on the topic should be reviewed prior to investigation. I have realized that neoliberalism functions in more subtle ways than purported by the literature. I assert that these subtle ways are related to politics of every society which have important implications for the general picture.

The general tendency to situate neoliberals versus others is not a fruitful polarization to unravel the dynamics that actually constitute the neoliberal world of today. Especially, when neoliberal interventions have begun resettling local frameworks and enforcing local bodies to employ the logics of neoliberal governmentality, understanding the negotiation among local actors requires a more complex attitude. In this sense, I suggest that neoliberal framework and functions should be defined as a structure and local actors and parties participating in this structure should be examined with respect to their agency to see whether they are enabling or disabling, countering or adapting, or both.

Lastly, I have three new horizons for new research that may be investigated parallel to this thesis. As I have explained before, I was also observing provincial councils in Van. I visited the council in Diyarbakir and met and interviewed three councilors which I excluded from this thesis. But the field proved to be quite intriguing. The composition and functioning of provincial councilors where BDP is the majority is quite different than municipal councils. The governor presides over the council and needs to ratify all decisions of the provincial council. This creates very heavy debates between the governor's office and councilors. The examination of these councils would inform more about how BDP's local actors imagine

geography, distribute resources and contribute to development and how governors in the Region purport to do so.

Second, the challenger party to BDP in the Region is AKP. I have not met, interviewed or spoken to the local actors of AKP. Investigating AKP's organizing in the Region, motivation of its local actors and their positions on Kurdish conflict and BDP would surely help to contextualize and compare the policies of AKP nationwide. The current research agenda either looks at AKP run municipalities or national politics of the government. I believe scholarly endeavor to unravel their positions in the Region would bear quite interesting results.

Third, as a more specific topic, I would have wanted to learn more about what local actors of AKP think on the project of Democratic Autonomy. Do they have an alternative? Do they see it fit to solve the conflict or the opposite? Are there aspects of the project they would support or not? And why are they organizing around AKP? All these questions are important and might challenge or support greatly my thesis and arguments on the project of Democratic Autonomy. The issue would be however to get informants from AKP to speak their minds freely.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW EXCERPTS IN TURKISH

No. 1

Biz ezilmiş bir halkın kentte yaşamı için mücadele ediyoruz. Aynı dağda özgürlük mücadelesi verenler gibi biz de bu işin siyasi ve belediye kanadıyız.

No. 2

Bir davaya inanmayabilirsin, ama zarar vermezsin. Benim temel görüşüm bu. Zaten PKK'nin halka söylediği budur. Sevmesen, sevmeyebilirsin. Ama zarar vermezsin. Etkin olmayabilirsin, ama en basiti zarar verecek söylemlere girmezsin.

No. 3

Dedim ki, tavuğunuz ölse bizi Diyarbakır'a çağırıyorsunuz. Valla yazın ortasında İHD bölge toplantısı için gitmem Diyarbakır'a. Geçen sene sıcakın ortasında gittik bir kere. Ben de ısrar ettim, Hakkari'de yapacaksınız bu sene diye. Hakkari ve Bitlis Şube de destekleyince, bu sene Hakkari'de yaptık.

No. 4

Q: Meclis üyesi olarak yerel yönetimler bürosuyla ilişkiniz nasıl? Gidip görüşüyor musunuz?

A: Yok gidip görüşmüyorum.

Q: Yerel yönetimler çalışmalarınıza katkıda bulunuyor mu? Eleştiriler yöneltiyorlar mı?

A: Onlar dışarıdan tepeden gelen insanlardır. Van'daki insanlar değil. Van'ın işleyişi bilen insanlar değil. Daha doğrusu, ne Iğdır'ı, ne Hakkari'yi, ne Doğu Beyazıt'ı bilen insanlar değil. Serhatlı da değil. Amed'den gelmişler. Kendilerince bir şeyler düzeltmeye çalışıyorlar. Bir gün Iğdır'da, bir gün Hakkari'de, bir gün Doğu Beyazıt'ta. Yerel yönetimler anlamında bana göre yeterli değiller.

Q: Bu anlayışa karşı mısınız? Diyarbakır'dan Van'a birinin gönderilmesi konusunda?

A: Valla Diyarbakır'dan Van'a birinin gönderilmesine karşıyım bir, yerel yönetimlere karşıyım bir kere. Yerel yönetimlerin şu anlamda etkinliği olması lazım, bana göre, parti içersinde bilinçli okumuş insanların, yerel yönetimlerde olması gerekiyor. Bir iş doğru gittiği zaman, Yerel yönetimler Van'ı bilmediği için, 3 kişi gider dedikodu yapar. Yerel yönetimler gelir müdahale eder. Daha önceden fen işleri başkana bağlıydı. İmar gerçi hala başkana bağlı. Yerel yönetimler geldiler, bunları başkan yardımcılara dağıttılar. Başkan yardımcısı arkadaşlar, bunların altından kalkamıyorlar. Sıkıntı orada yani.

No. 5

Liseyi Diyarbakır'da okudum. Bizim zamanımızda ilçede lise olmadığı için, o zaman solcu öğrenciler Diyarbakır'a ve Van'a gelirlerdi. Ben o zaman Diyarbakır'ı tercih etmiştim. 1973'ten beri siyasetle tanışıyorum. Lisedeydik. O zaman daha DDKO vardı. 1978-80 yılına kadar Ala Rızgari diye bir siyaset vardı. 1984 PKK'nin yapmış olduğu hamle ile birlikte, zaten diğer Kürt siyasetleri 12 Eylül faşizmi ile birlikte Türkiye'de bitmişti, dolayısıyla, ortada mücadele eden dinamik tek gücü PKK. 84 hamlesi ile birlikte biz de sempati duymaya başladık harekete. Bir yurtsever olarak destekledik.

No. 6

80'den önceydi. O zaman bir radyomuz vardı, bizim de yoktu, komşunun vardı. Saat 2'de söylüyordu. Erivan Radyosunda. Nerede olsam, Şivan Perwer'i dinlerdim. O zaman kaset yoktu. O zaman radyoydu. Sonra kasetleri çıktı. Bir teyp aldım ben. Askerler köye geldi. Gittim bütün kasetleri hayvan tezeklerinin yerine sakladım. Ondan sonra aceleden nereye koyduğumu bulamadım. Onların hepsi kaldı. İnsan neyse doğrusunu konuşur. Ben şahsım olarak Şivan Perwer'den dolayı, şehirde gelip şehirde okusaydım farklı olurdu, benim hareketim Şivan Perwer'le başladı. Millet bu aralar Şivan Perwer biraz şey oldu, ama yine de içimden bir türlü çıkmıyor.

No. 7

Partiyle daha önce zaten kendi ailem bir *yurtsever* aileydi. Küçükken de Başkale'deyken oradaki bazı ideolojik şeyler falan, DDKO falan vardı. Buradan öyle Kürt hareketini tanıdım.

No. 8

Kendi ailemle kardeşlerim de de bu davaya inandı. Bundan dolayı, köy yarı yarıya BDP'ye oy verdi. Bizim köy için yüksek bir oy oran. AKP'den 3 4 oy daha kazandık. Ben bu şekil, yani, yaşlılara diyordum, babam diyordu bana çok zaman sen delisin! Nasıl devlete karşı geliyorsunuz? Ya bu devlete karşı gelmek değil, ama sen insansın, hakkını savunman lazım! Hakkını savunmazsan, bir insan sana hakaret ederse, sen karşılık vermezsen, hakareti kabul edersen, insanda gerçekten eksiklik olur. Hem vicdanın, hem imanının, her şeyin eksikçe düşüyor. Ben bu şekil görüyorum. Bunu söyleye söyleye, bazıları artık bazı gerçekleri gördü.

No. 9

1980'den önce, hatta 1970'ten önce Irak'ta KDP vardı. Onlarla ilişkilerimiz vardı. Gelip gidiyorlardı mesela. Ama tabi, illegal hiçbir şeye girmedik. Ama ilişkilerimiz vardı.

No. 10

Bizim ailede de partiyle ilgisi olan kimse yoktu. Yani oylarını veriyorlardı Hadeb'e Dehap'a. Yani bizim ailede de Kürt milliyetçiliği vardır hepsinde. O bize de işlenmişti. Ama fiili olarak bir çalışma hiç birimizde yoktu.

No. 11

Kendimi bildim bileli bu siyasette yer alıyorum. Mehdi Zana döneminde de seçilmesi için çalıştım. Kendisiyle tanışmıyorum ama kazanması gerektiğine inanıyordum.

No. 12

Babam siyasetle uğraşıyordu. KUK'çuydu. UDG oluşturdular. Babam siyasi anlamda çalışıyordu. Bu hareket başladıktan sonra tamamen dönüş yaptılar. Herkes yaptı. O zaman da feshedildi. Bu tırşikçi takımı dediğimiz, hala onlar o şeydendirler.

No. 13

Abubekir Ağa'nın, Lezgin Ağa'nın isyanı başladığında, dedem de İmam'mış. Devlet onları dağıtıyormuş. Nereye isterse gidermiş, Atatürk'ün ölümü gelmeden önce bizim köyü istemişler, o günden beri bizim köyde yaşıyoruz.

No. 14

Biz erken siyasetle tanışmışız. Aşiretimiz Şeyh Sait isyanında zulüm gördü. Şu anki köyümüze de göçle gitmişiz. Şimdiki köye de Ermeniler katledildikten sonra gitmişler. Boşmuş köy yani. Siyasete karşı işte hep bir meyil var o yüzden. Büyükler mesela kendi eski köyden hissediyorlar. Bizse yeni köyden. Köy çok karıştı. Ermeniler dönmeler de dahil, Kulp'lu, Hani'li insanlar da vardı.

No. 15

Çok, çok, sana ne diyeyim yani! Bazı şeyler aklıma geliyor, diyorum ya keşke hiç görmeseydim. Bazı insanlar diyor ya yahu siz ne istiyorsunuz? Tabi siz bir şey görmediğin için, belki görmüşsün de işine gelmiyor. Onun için sen diyorsun, ne gördün? Ben gerçekten o sıralarda akla gelmeyecek şeyleri gördüm. O varlıklı insanların bu göçten dolayı, çok böyle insan vardı; 30 40 tane misafiri vardı. Perişan olmuştu. Perişanlık çok gördüm. Kendi şahsım değil yani, insanları görerek, eğer insan vicdan sahibiyse, gerçekten çok etki yaratıyor.

No. 16

Kış aylarında hayvanından evinden her şeyinden olan, o hayvanları getirip ucuz bir şeye satarak, bu sokaklara geliyorlar. Çok insan, o zaman yine yöneticiydim, sokakları geziyordum, ev ev geziyordum. O zaman şehirde yer yoktu, 2 3 ev üst üste girmişti insanlarımız. O insanlarımız ne çilelerle, amelelikle, arabalar üzerinde, halden bir şey getirip çarşıda satarak, günlük geçimini yapmak için çalıştılar. İnan ki o insanlar çok cefa çekti. Geliyorlardı, yanımızda ağlıyorlardı, diyordu ki, ben bu kadar servetin sahibiydim, gelmişim dilencilik yapıyorum. 77-78 yaşında bir dayı, karşımda oturup ağladı. Ben bunun sahibiydim, onun sahibiydim, bugüne geldim dileniyordum. Köyümü yıktılar yaktılar, 12 nüfusla geldim şehre, bu saatten sonra ne yapabilirim dedi. Bazen sokaklara girdiğimiz zaman, inan ki kendimizi tutamıyoruz ağlıyoruz. Çünkü o insanları o halde gördüğümüz zaman, mağdur perişan aç olduğu zaman... Şu an Sur'da hala çok insanlar daha açtır. Adam gidip bir yerde tandır ekmeği vuruyor, o çocuğun geçimini yapmak için. Çoğununun öyle bir imkanı da yok. Un alıp, o ekmeği yoğurup satıp, çocuğuna... Bazı insanların o imkanı da yok. Burada evini yerleştirdikten sonra Batıya gidip, orada da ayrımcılık görerek, yok kardeşim sen Güneydoğudan geldin, teröristler sana iş versin. Bu şartlar altında kalan insanlarımız vardı yani. Bu insanlarımız çok cefa, çok eziyet çekti.

No. 17

Q: O zaman siz bayındırlık bakanlığında çalışıyordunuz, bakanlık bu konuda bir şey yapıyor muydu?

A: Hayır, yapmıyordu.

Q: Peki, bakanlık ne yapıyordu o dönemde?

A: Bayındırlık bakanlığı buna yönelik her hangi bir çözüm üretmedi. Sadece Çatak'ta Köy-Kent diye bir yer yaptı. Ecevit'in projesiydi zaten. Biz Köy-Kent'in Kürt halkının yaşamına uygun bir yer olmadığını söylemişim o dönemde.

Q: Bakanlığın içersindeki çalışanlara baskı yapıyor muydu?

A: Biz, köy-kent yapılacağına, yakılan köylerin devlet tarafından yeniden onarılacak, insanca yaşanabilecek şekilde, yeniden yapılmasını istemiştik. Ancak bu şekilde, insanların dönüş yapabileceğini, rahat edebileceğini söylemişim. Örneğin siz köy-kent yaptınız, adamın köyü 30 km ilerde, nasıl gidip gelecek? Ne ulaşım var, ne araç gereci var! Bu anlamda, anlamsız bir şey bu köy-kent. Bizim halkımızın yaşantısına uygun bir proje değildi. Halkın geçim kaynağı ya hayvancılık, ya tarımdır. Bu köy-

kent mantığı, bana göre, insanları bir yere toplayıp, bir ağanın tahakkümü altına ve yahut, güvenlik güçlerinin tahakkümü altına sokmaya yönelik bir projedir.

Q: Devlet bir politika geliştirmede için siz halk olarak örgütlenmeye çalışıyordunuz.

A:Eee, tabi. Ben emekli olduğum zaman bu GÖÇ-DER vardı. Önemsediğim için, bu kurumda yer almak istedim, çalışmak istedim.

Q: Dayanışma anlamında nasıl yardımda bulunuyordunuz?

A: Birbirleriyle dayanışma, örneğin sorunlarına ilişkin, gıda giyim türü şeyler. İlgili kurumlara dilekçe yazmak, hakkını sormak, ücretsiz avukat bulmak.

No. 18

Bir devlet vatandaşına bu uygulamayı yapar mı? Bu devlet can ve mal güvenliğimizden sorumlu! O saat ve dakikaya kadar ben bilmiyordum. Daha sonradan, ben karar aldım. Bundan sonra halkım neredeyse, halkımla birlikte bu mücadeleyi yürüteceğim. Bu mücadeleyi yürütürken, yıkma temelinde değil, mevcut yasaların değişimine ve demokratikleşmesine yönelik olacak dedim.

No. 19

Köyün tamamı yakıldı. Ben köy yakıldığı zaman oradaydım. Tatillerde köye gidiyorduk. Kışın Diyarbakır'da, yazın köydeydik. Köye koruculuk dayatılmıştı. Ne kabul ettik, ne de köy yakılmasına rağmen köylüler köyü terk ettiler. Çadır kurdular, ama geri döndüler. Direndiler. Aşiret bağları direnmede olumlu bir etki oldu. Aşiret büyükleri konuşup ikna ediyordu insanları. Üç aşiret birleşip direndiler. Hepsi Zaza köyü.

No. 20

1990larda zorluk vardı. Köyde de bir bağımız vardı. Köyümüz 9 yıl boş kaldı. 93'te evimiz yakıldı. Bağımız yakıldı. AİHM'e başvuru yaptık. Dava kazandık. Şimdi çok mu değişti, yok. Ama o zaman daha kabaydı baskılar. Şimdi de baskılar devam ediyor. Daha ince ve sistemli bir şekilde hem de. Geçim sıkıntısı olduğu için, arazi elverişli olmadığı için göç ettik. Yazın köye, kışın da Diyarbakır'a gidiyorduk. Büyüyünce çocukların eğitim sıkıntısı da olacaktı.

No. 21

1995'e kadar şöyle dayandık. 89'un Mart ayında köyün tamamını korucu yaptı devlet. Ya korucu olursun, her ailede 1 2 kişi, en sonunda ailenin bütünü, 18 yaşını bitiren herkes korucu oldu. Korucu olurken, devletle baş başa operasyonlara giderdiler, karakolun alt taraflarında nöbet tutarlardı. Köyün 4 köşesinde mevzi idi, korucularla asker birlikte. 1995'in Mayıs ayında asker köyü boşalttı gitti. Gidince, siz şu beldeye gidin dediler. Biz dedik, o köye gelmeyeceğiz. Köyümüz daha hoştur, daha ormanlıktır, daha ovadır, daha şirindir. O köye gelmezseniz o zaman bu köyden de gidin falan köyde koruculuğu yapın. Biz dedik, tarlamızı evimizi bırakıp o köye gidemeyiz. Biz gitsek başka yere gideceğiz. O zaman gidin dediler. Bu köyde kalmayacaksınız. Askeriyeyi burada kaldırdık, askeriye burada olmadığı için, siz bu köyde kalırsanız yardım yataklık yapacaksınız PKK'ye. Biz 89'dan bugüne kadar sizinle baş başayız, silah elimizde, dağları arıyoruz, operasyonlara gidiyoruz, çatışmalara giriyoruz. Dedik biz siz bize güvenmiyor musunuz? Yok, dedi, size güvenmiyoruz. Ya şu köye gideceksin, ya da askeriye var şu beldede, ya da bu köyde kalmayacaksınız. O şekilde biz de kalktık. Arabaları istedik. Normal elbiseleri, yatakları attık arabaya. Evin tamamını getirmedi. Köyden çıktık, 3. Gün haber

geldi, vallah sizin evlerinizin hepsini yaktılar. Benzin mazot döküp yakmışlar. ... 95 sonbaharında seçim de vardı. Seçim sıcaklığı da vardı. Siyasi partiler geldi. Rahmetli Ecevit geldi, Rahşan hanımla birlikte. Ben o zaman grubun sözcüsü olarak konuştum. Sayın Ecevit ile konuştum. O da dedi ki, benim yüreğim yanıyor, böyle insanlara bunu yapanlar kim ise, bunu çekmek zorundadır. Sizin suçunuz ne dedi. Ben resmen açık açık da dedim, bizim suçumuz Kürt olduğu için. Biz Kürt olduğumuz için... Başka suçumuz yok, biz ne yaptık? 89'un Mart ayından, 95'in Haziran 15'ine kadar, biz devletle silah aldık, ikinci askerlik yaptık. Gene bize güvenmediler, gene bize buyurun dediler, köyü boşaltılar.

No. 22

O günden sonra, siyasi olarak, belki bana diyeceksin, sen köyden geldin, köylülerin fazla siyasi düşüncesi yoktur... Ben diyorum, sen demiyorsun. Şimdi benim siyasi düşüncem şöyleydi, ben diyordum ki, bu dava bitsin, bu kan dursun, bu çocuklar ölmesin diye hangi partide kurtuluş görürsem o partinin çalışanı olurum. O zaman HADEP vardı. HADEP'e gittim. Baktım HADEP'de diyorlardı ki, biz barış istiyoruz, demokrasi, insanlık istiyoruz. Dağdaki gerillalar ölmesin, ovadaki asker polis ölmesin. Ben bunu bütün siyasi hayatımda duydum ve gördüm, halen de şimdi inanıyorum. Şimdi ben o partide üye oldum. Bugüne kadar hala siyasetime orada devam ediyorum. ... Ben ilk başta bu partide yer aldığımda, ışığı burada gördüm, bu parti mücadele eder. Ben DSP'de de görseydim, Ecevit'le tanıştığım zaman, DSP'ye üye olacaktım, ama programlarında görmedim.

No. 23

1976 yılında Diyarbakır'a göç ettik, ekonomik sebeplerden. Bağlar ilçesinde büyüdüm. Ailemle inşaat sektöründe çalıştık.

No. 24

Dayılarımın hepsi Van'da olduğundan dolayı, babam onların yanına gelmiş. Annem aslen Erüh'lu ama dedelerimin hepsi Van'da olduğundan dolayı gelmişler. Köydeydik, Van'a geldik. Peynirciler vardı, tahin reçel salata, kahvaltı türü, köylüye hitap eden, karpuz peynir üzüm filan satıyordu.

No. 25

Liseye kadar Van'da okudum. Babam çiftçiydi, sonra esnafılık yaptı. Askerlik sonrası inşaat, imalat işlerine başladım. Briketçiler Kooperatif başkanlığını yaptım. Aynı işe devam ediyorum.

No. 26

Askerlik de bittikten sonra, bazı nedenlerden dolayı, ekonomi olabilir vs. gibi şeylerden sonra Van'a yerleştik. 80'lerden sonra. Ticaret yaptık. Kişisel olarak lokantacılıktan başladım. Otogar tesislerinde bir restoran açtım. Uzun yıl orada... Daha sonra şehir merkezinde inşaat sektörüne atandık. Arsa alarak, kooperatif şeklinde birkaç yer yaptık. Yap-sat işini ben ortaklarımla beraber yapıyorum.

No. 27

Bingöllüyüm. 1941 yılında doğdum. Okumadım. Askerliğimi yaptıktan 15 yıl sonra köye ilkokul geldi. Arapça eğitimi gördüm. Medrese kökenliyim. Muş'ta çeşitli yerlerde eğitim gördüm. Gördüğüm ilmin sayesinde liseye kadar dışarıdan okuyup bitirdim. Çeşitli köylerde eğitim gördüm, medrese talebeleri öyledir, gezgindirler.

Diyarbakır'a 1957 senesinde geldim. Askerlikten sonra Kurşunlu Cami'de imam oldum. İmam Hatip dışarıdan okudum bitirdim. Devlet memuru olarak imam oldum. 29 yıl çalıştıktan sonra emekli oldum. 1995 yılında emekliye ayrıldım. Hizmetime karşı 450 lira aldım. 7 yetimli dul kadına çalışsaydım bana daha fazla para verirdi.

No. 28

1990'larda beyaz eşya ticareti yapıyordum. Birçok faili meçhul ve baskı gördüm. Zorla mahkemeye götürüldüm. Kepenk kapatma sonrası suçlandım.

No. 29

1993'te Van'a geldim. Tamamen bir istek, daha önce İstanbul'daydık. Ama İstanbul'da yapamadığımız için Van'ı tercih ettik.

No. 30

İflas eder gibi bir duruma geldim. Batıdaki iş yerimi sattım. Biliyorsun insan nereye giderse memleketim der. Hatta İstanbul'a gitmeyi düşünüyordum, sonradan Van'a geldim. Van'da herhangi bir iş kurmadım. Gelmemim sebebi buydu, yabancı bir memleket. 6 yıl boyunca, bir hayrını görmedim. Benim kapı komşum gelmezdi bayramda, selam vermezdi.

No. 31

Babam müteahhit. Güneydoğu'da devletin işlerini alıp yapıyordu. Daha sonra iş alamamaya başladı. Dosyasına kırmızı çizgi çizmişlerdi. Önceden Muş-Bingöl tarafından iş alıyordu. Mersin'e göç etmesinde bunlar da etkendi. Mersin'e gidince babam müteahhitlik yapmaya devam etti. Mersin'de 8 sene kaldık. O sürede geri dönme isteği hiç tükenmemişti. Aile bireyleri ve büyükleri de bunu istiyordu. Bu şekilde çocukluktan gençliğe geçtik. Diyarbakır'da Yenişehir'e döndük. Daha elit bir yer olduğu için, baskıları daha az hissediyor. Siyasi bakımdan bizim gibi bir aile geri dönünce böyle kaygıları oluyordu. Mersin'deyken babamın bürosunda çalışıyordum. Mersin'de ihalelerde sorun yaşamıyordu. 2005'ten sonra Güneydoğu'da ihale almaya devam etti. Fakat son 3 yıldır kendi dosyasıyla yine ihale alamıyor.

No. 32

Mesela ayakkabı boyacılığından tut inşaata kadar, sıva işinde, tuğla işinde çalıştım, bulaşıkçılık yaptım, her yaz çalıştım yani. Lise üçte, üniversiteyi o yıl kazandım Diyarbakır Meslek Yüksek Okulu Bilgisayar Uygulamalı bölümünü kazandım. 93'de kazandım en son küreğimi yere vurup dedim ki ben üniversiteyi kazandım artık bir daha inşaatta çalışmayacağım. Üniversite için Diyarbakır'a gittim orada işte öğrenim süresi iki yıldır bölümün. O zaman işte arkadaşlardan etkilendim dedim ki muhasebeci olacağım, aklıma yerleşti. Van'a geldim mezun olup. Van'da kalmıştık ama kimseyi tanıımıyordum çünkü çevremde inşaatçılık hamallık işleri vardı yani esnaf olarak kimseyi tanıımıyordum. Geldim dolaşıyordum işte muhasebecileri. ... Dedim ki işte ben şu okulu bitirdim iş arıyorum stajyerlik yapacağım falan. O zaman işte Temmuz 1995'de orada muhasebede işe başladım.

No. 33

Bizim ailede 60 hanemiz vardı. 60 hanenin 57 hanesi buraya geldi. 3 Kişi orada kaldı. Onlar da yol parası bulamayınca orada kaldı. Böylesi bir durum yani, aile de dağıldı. Bazısı buraya yerleşti. Bazısı İstanbul'a, Adana'ya yerleşti. Şu anda her birimiz bir yerde. Şimdi geldik buraya, burada iş de yok. Güç de yok. Benim eşim

halı kursu öğretmeni, kalkınma vakfında çalışıyordu. Lice'deki atölyeyi de yaktılar. Yaktıktan sonra da, işlerine son verdiler. Tazminatını aldı. O tazminatı biz burada yedik. O parayla idare ettik. Sonra burada kendimize bir market de burada açtık. ... Bizim ailede şöyle bir durum var, biz komünal yaşamı seviyoruz. Birisini darlığa girdiği an, diğerleri elinde avucunda ne varsa getirip ona veriyor. Biz de böylesi bir komünal yaşam var. Mesela şu var, kardeşime ev var, bacılarımın, kardeşlerim, ve ya yakın akrabalarım elinde bulunan birikimleri getirdiler. Biz parayı denkleştirdik. Bir kısmı eksik kaldı, bankadan kredi çektik. Küçük biraderime ev aldık. Dayanışma devam ediyor.

No. 34

Bir nevi geldiler, meslekleri de yoktu onların. Köyden gelen insan ne yapar, hayvancılık, çiftçilik vesaire. Devletin öyle, seni buradan aldım da geldin şehre, sana bir hayat tarzı vereyim, sana bir köy, bir ev, bir iş vereyim, çok zor bir iş. Düşünebiliyor musun, birisi sizi evinizden, işinizden, her şeyinizden alıkoyup diyecek ki, hiçbir şey yok, al git işine bak. Bu çok dramatik bir olay. Çok zor bir yaşam tarzı. O insanlar eziyet çektiler. Çok zor şartlarda, şu anda da çok zor şartlarda, ne oldu, kendini şehirde gördü, ütülü pantolon giydi, ben de şehirliyim dedi, bir de cep telefonu alayım belki de, olmadı! Neye sarıldı? Bir tablacı, bir şeyler sattı, çorap sattı. Zabıtası peşine verildi. Adamın dünyası yıkıldı. Ne yapabilirim? Meslek yok, bir şey yok, el sanatı yok. Bu kişi ne yapacak? Bir araya geldiler, düşünce attık ortaya. O zaman da arsalar çok pahalı değildi Van'da. Mesut Öztürk zamanında onlar için bir cadde açtı, büfeler vardı. Yer edindi onlar. Ana arter açıldı, geçici olarak büfe kurdular. Ticareti öğrendiler. Çoğu da Türkçe bilmez. Biraz da para da oldu. Ufacık para. Ben hatırlıyorum, anasının dokunduğu kilim vardı, 3 5 altını vardı. Yer bulduk, burayı alalım, ahım şahım değil ama, tenekeden bir şey koyalım. Kişi başına 15 m2 yer, 10 m2lik dükkânlar. Görmüşsün, gezmişsindir çoğunu ama şu anda Van'a hitap ediyor. İstanbul'dan çıkan gelen adam önce gidiyor orayı gezecek. Öyle bir cazibe haline geldi. İnsanlar bunu yaptılar, mülk edindiler. Kooperatifleştirdiler. Ufak birikimlerini bir araya getirerek, kocaman yerler aldılar. 2bin 3bin m2lik yerler aldılar. Şu anda da öyle yerlerdir zaten. Öyle modern şeyler değil, altyapıdan yoksun yerler. Onu başarabildiler. Biraz da hayatı öğrendiler. Ticareti öğrendiler.

No. 35

Bulunduğum bölgede, 7-8 tane kooperatif var, bine yakın dükkan var. Onların bir de etkisi var benim seçilmemde. Oradaki kooperatif başkanlarına kendimizi kabul ettirmişiz, tanıtmışız ki, onlar da bu kişi bizim kabulümüzdür. Ve mahalle geliyor.

No. 36

99'da Diyarbakır'ın bir ilçesinde belediye başkanı adayı oldum. Seçimi kazandık ama maalesef sandıklarımız kaçırıldı. Saat 11'e kadar belediye başkanı oldum. Kutluma yapıldı, tebrikler yapıldı. 11den sonra sandıklar kaçırıldı. Seçimi kaybettik. ... Yüzbaşının kendisi yani. Bölük komutanı. Kaymakamın, emniyetin parmağı vardı. Hepsı işbirliği yaptı. O zaman Anavatan partisine gitti. Sonradan itiraf da ettiler. Senden aldıktan sonra pişman olduk. Seçimi aldınız, abim de köyde muhtardı. Ramazan beyden aldığımıza pişmanız. Anavatan diyor bunu. ... 99'da Çınar'da aday olduğum zaman, gidişim gözaltı, gelişim gözaltı. Batman Bismil yolunda, gidişimde orada sabah 3 4 saat gözaltındaydım, akşam gelirken de. Esnaf ziyareti yaparken yine öyle. Sorduğum zaman yetkililere, askere ya da emniyete, beni niye gözaltına

alıyorsunuz, sebebi nedir? Üstten bana emir gelmiş, biz de seni hangi nedenle gözaltına aldığımızı bilmiyoruz. Bizim gelen emir, nedir onu uyguluyoruz. Artık yani canıma tak etti. Kaymakam'a avukatımı aldım gittim. Senin gibi bir teröristle görüşmek istemiyorum dedi. Dedim valla en büyük terörist sizsiniz! Ben bir siyaset partinin belediye başkanı adayım, eğer sen Anavatana nasıl yaklaşım gösteriyorsan, bana da aynı yaklaşımı göstermek zorundasın. Diyelim ki, biz burada 5 parti seçime girmişiz, onlara nasıl davranıyorsan bana da öyle davranman lazım. Dedi ki, ben parti olarak senin partine bakmam, siz terörist bir partisisiniz, direkmen siz talimatı PKK'den alıyorsunuz. Öyleyse, seçime koymayın, biz siyasi bir partiyiz. Siyasi mücadelemizi veriyoruz, halka gidiyoruz. Sandık bir yarıştı, hangi parti çıkarsa o arkadaşları tebrik ederim. Çıkarım giderim ben, ama kalkıp benim önüme bu engelleri koyarsan yanlış yapıyorsunuz.

No. 37

Ben gençlik yıllarımda, 1990'lı yıllarla birlikte, gençlik yıllarımızda, parti içersinde legal siyasi çalışmalarda bulundum. Bu çerçevede tabi ki biz 1990'lı yıllarda hani şöyle bir şey vardı, partinin sokağından insanların geçemediği yıllarda biz bu kentte siyaset yaptık. Gençlik o zaman. Gerçekten partimizin bulunduğu sokaktan insanlar geçmekten kokardı. Mesela bir anekdot söyleyeyim, benim başımdan geçen bir şey anlatayım. Benim akrabalarımın büyük bir kısmı yıllarca bana selam vermiyorlardı. Korkudan. Biz selam verirken devlet de bizi onlardan bilir korkusuyla selam vermeyip geçen çok akrabam vardı. Şimdi itiraf ediyorlar bazen. O yıllar biz size selam veremiyorduk. Çünkü size selam verirken bizi de alırlar mı korkusu vardı insanlardı. Özellikle faili meçhul dönemi olarak bilinen 90'lı yılların başında başlayan süreçte herkes burada siyaset yapan Kürt cenahı diyelim, gerçekten, derler ya kefeni cebinde, kefeni cebinden öteyi, kefeni boynunda siyaset yaptılar. Gençlik yıllarındaki arkadaşlarım, bazıları yurtdışında, bazıları öldürülmüş, bazıları bir şekilde kriminalize edilmiş ve siyasetin dışına itilmiş birçok arkadaşımı hatırlıyorum. Bu bölgede siyaset yapmak gerçekten ideal sahibi olmak zordur. Tabi bunları göğüslemek ve başa çıkmak kolay bir şey değil, zor bir süreçti. Ancak Kürt halkının mücadelesiyle, Kürt gençlerinin bedenleriyle ödedikleri bedellerle siyasal süreci bugün daha farklı bir düzeye çektiler. Burada özellikle o yıllarda gerçekten canını, can pazarının yaşandığı Kürdistan'da, canını adeta pazara süren gençlikle bugüne gelindi.

No. 38

Yıllarca siyaset içindeyiz, biraz değişiklik olsun, biraz da hizmet alanına girerim. Hep devamlı siyaset yaptık, biraz da halkımıza hizmeti götürelim. Şu anda burada olmam da bana apayrı bir haz veriyor.

No. 39

2004'te de ben yine aday oldum. Dosyayı verdim. Niye ben oldum, beni seçtiler, ben onu desem, yanlış olur, muhakkak bir şeyler vardı ki arkadaşlar beni kabul etmişler. O zaman dosyalar verdik, arkadaşlar küsmüşler, benim dosyayı almadılar, ya da yakın sıraya bırakmadılar. O zaman ben kendi sıramı başka bir arkadaşaya verdim. Niye sen böyle yapıyorsun diye bana küstüler. Ben partiliyim, ben küsmeyeceğim. Meclis üyesi olsam olmasam, parti benim için aynıdır. Bu arkadaş biraz kızmıştır. Ben yerimi ona verdim. O da seçilmedi daha doğrusu. Biz kaybedince, o da seçilmedi daha doğrusu.

No. 40

Kendi çabamızla aslında bir şey yaptık. Oranın altyapısı 0'ken, bir yüzde 80 altyapı sorunu çözüldü. Oradaki kadınların çoğu göç almış, yüzde 80 90'ı savaştan dolayı göç almış bir belde, köyleri yakılmış yıkılan insanlardan oluşan bir belde. Kadınların orada ayrıca gördüğü manevi şiddetin yoğun olduğu bir beldeydi. Oraya bir kadın belediye başkanının, meclis üyesinin seçilmesi, yönetimin en azından bir dönem orada, şu anda hala kadın da var, yönetmesi bayağı bir değişiklik yarattı. Mesela sadece erkeklerin gitme alışkanlığı bilenen bir alandı, daha sonraki süreçte erkekler değil, sürekli kadınlar gelmeye başladı. Altyapı, su sorunu, ekonomik, maddi manevi sorunların hepsini kadınların gelip dile getirdiği bir yer olmaya başladı. Aslında kadınların da bir şeyleri yapabileceği anlaşıldı görüldü. Aşama aşama daha devam ediyor. Hala da şu an öyle. Değişip dönüştü aslında belde. ... Ben aslında Van'da oturuyordum. Beldeden Van'a gidiş gelişler zor oluyordu. Orada meclis üyesiyken ben kendi yedeğimi oluşturdum. 2004 yılında oradan bir kadın meclis üyesi çıkaramadık, kimse aday olmadı o kadar çaba sarf etmemize rağmen, biz örnek de teşkil ettik. Kendi yedeğimizi de oluşturduk. Bizden sonra o işi yapmaya hevesli olan, gönüllü olan kadınlar çıktı. İhtiyaç duymadım tekrar aday olmaya. Van'ı tercih ettim. Van'da, orada yapabildiklerimizi burada yapabilmek için. Burada daha yapabileceğimiz daha çok şeyler olduğuna inandığım için.

No. 41

Demokratik özerkliğin ana maddesi yereldir. Yerelde en çok ilgilenen kadınlardır. Tabandan tavana diyoruz biz, ve taban zaten biz kadınlarız. Yerelin en çok önemli sorunları da kadınlardır. Direktman bizi ilgilendiren konulardır. Bu konuda da biz kadınların, kendi haklarımızın ve yapmamız gereken ve bilmemiz gerekeni biz oluşturmamızdır. Eğer bunu biz yapamazsak, özerkliğin çok başarısı olmasını beklemiyoruz. Kadınlar bu işi üstlenmezlerse, özerkliğin ana hedeflenen şeyi gerçekleşmez. Kadın meclisi olarak çıktığımızda birkaç defa, biz kadınlara sorduk, özerklik denildiği zaman siz ne düşünüyorsunuz. Bir yaşlı anne çıkıp şunu kaldırıp söyledi, biz özerkliği paylaşım olarak düşünüyoruz. Yani birbirimize yardımlaşma olarak düşünüyoruz. Senin derdin benim derdim olarak düşünüyoruz. Ben onu çok önemsemiştim, demek ki bizim kadınlarımız bu işi bilmiyor değil ama ne kadar bu işte onlar etkili olabilecekler, yaptırımcı olabilecek, onu da bizim iyi örgütlenip kadınlar konusunda iyi çalışmamız gerekiyor. Kadınları bu konuya muhatap yapmamız gerekiyor.

No. 42

Meclis üyeleri seçilirken, meclis bünyesinde şu işten anlayan bir meclis üyesi de olsun diye seçilmez. Sadece her hangi bir parti için değil, bütün bölge için geçerli. Burada kısmen aşılmış olsa da, aile, çevre ilişkileri, feodal yaklaşımlar bir yerde devam ediyor. Belki çizgi olarak devam etmese de, zihinlerde devam ediyor. Siyasilerin de zihinlerinde bu devam ediyor. Meclisler belirlenirken bu dengeler kuruluyor biraz daha. Bu dengeler nedir: Şu çevreyi küstürmeyelim onlardan da bir aday alalım. Şoförler cemiyetinden de bir kişi alalım, falan aşiretinden de bir kişi alalım. Van'da çok sayıda Şırnaklı var, bir tane de Şırnaklı meclis üyemiz olsun. Gibi yaklaşımlar var. Bunlar belirleyici olunca, doğallığında belediye meclisinin bilimsel davranmasını beklemek çok doğru değil.

No. 43

Ben bu belediye de çöpçü olarak çalıştım. Ben istasyonda hamal olarak gittim, çocuklarım küçüktü, eve gidiyordum, eşim ağlıyordu. Anam sağdı, ben köyde öyle değildim. Köyde arazim çoktu, her şeyim vardı. Ben, çok af edersin, ağalık iyi bir şey değil ama ağa gibiydim. Ama buraya geldim, akşama kadar kömür... Diyordum aç kalmayalım, çocuklarım aç kalmasın, okula giderken, 5 kuruş ellerine verelim. Bunları da yaptık. Partide de siyaset yaparken, partinin geliri yoktu, sen nasıl yaptın diyeceksin. Ben zaman zaman Yüksekova'ya giderdim, İran şekeri getirirdim, pirinç getirirdim, burada bizim mahallelere satardım, 5 kuruş oradan kazanırdım. Hakkari'ye giderdim, Irak malları gelirdi, minibüslerle getirirdim, satardım. Çocuğum falan da büyümüşü, yazın okul tatillerinde, 2 çocuğum da, kahvelerde çalışırdı. Yani günlük ihtiyaç için, partide de çalışıyordum. Partide de arkadaşlar bana baktılar sağ olsunlar, sen dürüstsün, gözün rantta menfaatte olmadığı için, seni belediye meclis üyeliğine öneriyoruz.

No. 44

İlçede yeniden başkan adayı olarak gösterilmiştim. Ama ben dedim görevimi yaptım, başka bir arkadaşı önerdim. Fakat seçim komisyonundaki arkadaşlar dosyamı geri vermediler. Dediler sen bize lazımsın. En az Merkez ilçede bu görevi sorumluluğu alacaksın. Bizim için görev önemlidir, eğer halkımız için hizmet yapabilirsek, severek bunu yaparız.

No. 45

Ben gördüm ki, o zamanki büyüklerimiz hal hatır için seçim yapıyordu. Örneğin falan kes bizim aşiret reisimizdir. O kime verirse bizim için fark etmez. Kime çalışırsa bize fark etmez. O zaman kamu kuruluşları yeni yeni bir sürü insan alıyordu. O zaman girebiliyordun kamu kuruluşuna. Sana oy veriyorum, o zaman benim oğlumu işe al. Böyle anlayışlar vardı. Biz sonradan, genel durumları değerlendirdiğimiz zaman, her şeyden önce demokrasi ve insan hakları dedim. Bir memlekette demokrasi ve insan hakları yoksa, o memleket yıkılmaya mahkumdur. ... Ben zaten partide yöneticiyken, hem HADEP döneminde hem DEHAP döneminde, özellikle HADEP döneminde partimiz belediyeyi almıştı. İlgileniyordum. Belediye başkanlarıyla, şeylerle bazen çalışmalara giriyordum. Takip ediyordum. Bundan sonraki dönemlerde de yine, bizim partimizin siyasi durumunu biliyorsun, diğer sistem partileri gibi seçimden seçime değil, biz ara sürede de gene devamlı halkla haşır neşiriz. Halkın sorunlarıyla. Ben de bu konuda seçilirsem, bir katkı olur. O yüzden kararımı verdim. Başvurdum. Gelen öneriler üzerinde de, ondan sonra da seçildim.

No. 46

Çok sayıda seçim tecrübelerimiz var. Hemen hemen bütün seçimlerde aktif olarak seçildim. 2009 yerel seçimleri öncesi DTP'den STK üyesi bir arkadaşın da meclis üyesi talebi geldi. Bu o zaman partiden sivil toplum örgütlerinin çoğuna iletilmişti. Oradan biraz öneriler gelişmiş. Birçok kişi meclise girmem konusunda öneride bulunmuş. Bu çerçevede partiden arkadaşlar da gelip görüştüler. Seçim öncesi DTP'nin bir eğilim yoklaması yaptı Van'da, üyeleri arasında, başvuranlar arasında. Yani meclis üyesi için başvuranlar için eğilim yoklaması yapılıyor. Ben başvurduğumda 80 civarında başvuru vardı belediye meclisine girebilmek için. Parti kendi üyeleri arasında bir eğilim yoklaması yaptı. O seçime de girmiştım. En yüksek oyu ben aldım. Ondan sonra parti listesinden 4. Sırada meclis üyesi adayı oldum.

No. 47

Meclis üyesi olmaya 2009'da karar verdim. Gerçekten insan insanların hizmetini yaparsa çok önemlidir. İlim sahibi olarak, bir faydamız olsun, hizmet verelim diye. Çoğunluğun dediği olur, dinen de, dünyada da olur. Herkes fikrini söyler, düşünce serbesttir. Başkanımız defalarca söylemiş. Ben burada seçilmişsem, herkesin belediye reisiyim. Türk, Kürt, Arap, gayrimüslüm olabilir. Mesela, bir Kilise hizmet isterse, ona da hizmet görürüm. Onların da belediye başkanayım. Dinen de böyledir. Ayı gayrı olmayacak. Başkan nasıl diyorsa biz de öyle yapacağız. Fikir düşüncesi neyse, insan birdir. Hizmete layıktır. ... Biz vazifemizi yapıyorduk 1990'larda. Bana bir gün sordular, hangi partidensin diye, ben camime her partiden adam gelir, ama perdenin arkasında vicdanımla baş başa kalırım. Bana teklif ettiler. Siyaset işidir ama ben karışmıyorum. Din adamı olduğun zaman siyaset dışı olacak, tarafsız olacak, neden çünkü din adamıdır.

No. 48

Türkiye'de Cumhuriyetin kuruluşundan beri bir çeşit idari yapılanma yapılmış. Birileri oturmuş, şu ilçe şu ilçeye yakın, bu ilçe büyük bu il olsun, bu ilçe küçük buna bağlı olsun, demiş planlamışlar. Geldiğimiz aşamada, bunların aslında rasyonel olmadığı, bu planların yürüyemeyeceği ortaya çıkmış. Ama işte devlet akıllı, devletin korumacı muhafazakar akıllı, bir şekilde kendini koruma derdinde ve idari sistemini değiştirmeye yanaşmıyor. Bunun yerine alternatifini arıyor. Çevre düzeni planı hazırlanıyor, neler göz önünde bulunduruluyor, akarsular, akarsu yatakları, ortak yataklar, ve ya Van gölü gibi kapalı havzalarda havza sınırları, iklim koşulları, coğrafi koşullar göz önüne alınarak yeni yeni planlamalar yapılıyor.

No. 49

Q: Fiziksel yönüyle mi bakıyor yani sadece? Sosyal ve kültürel yönüyle bakmıyor mu?

A: O konuya geleceğim. Devletin kat edebildiği aşama bu kadardır. 100 yıl aradan sonra coğrafyadan bağımsız düşünemeyeceğini kavradı. Ve bir dere yatağını şu kısmı Bitlis tarafında kalıyor, şu kısmı Van'da kalıyor, o tarafı Van'ı ilgilendirir aşamasından yeni yeni geçebiliyor. Artık derelerin bir bütün olduğunu yeni yeni kavlıyor. Ve ya Van'daki hava kirliliğinin Bitlis üzerindeki etkisinin, ortaya çıkmasıyla Bitlis ve Van için ortak bir program yapılmalı aşamasına yeni yeni geliyor. Bir de bunun ikinci aşaması olacak, o da nedir, oradaki halkın sosyal yaşamı, kimliği, statüsü, ekonomik durumu, bunlar da ikinci aşamada. Devlet daha bunu planlayacak, belki elli yıl, belki yüz yıl sonra. Biz bunu hızlandırmak zorundayız. Biz bunu devleti beklemeden planlamak zorundayız. Devlet diyor ki ben Ağrı'ya bir Devlet Su İşleri kuramam, bunun farkında. DSİ bir bölge olmak zorunda. Ya da karayolları ağı oluşturacak, her ile bir karayolları il müdürleri kuramayacağının farkında, bölge müdürlükleri kurmak zorunda. Mesela Patnos, Ağrı'nın ilçesidir ama Karayolları olarak Van'a bağlıdır. Patnos'un çıkışındaki köylerden itibaren Erzurum'a bağlıdır. *Aslında devlet bir şekilde bölgeleri özerkleştirmiş zaten. Sadece kabul etme aşamasında, bunu kabul edebilecek esnekliğe sahip değil.*

No. 50

Viranşehir'de otobüsleri kamulaştırdılar, çok önemli bir olay dediler, alkışladık. Büyükşehir Belediyesi otobüsleri özelleştirdi, ona da çok büyük başarı dediler, yine alkışladık.

No. 51

Bizim 12.5 yıllık yerel yönetimler tecrübemiz var. Biz ilk 5 yılını tamamen tecrübe edinme süreci olarak kabul ediyoruz zaten 36 belediyeyle. İkinci 5 yıl, bu tecrübeyi kaynağa dönüştürme aşamasıdır. Ciddi anlamda ulaşılabilir bilgi kaynağına ve öneri kaynağına dönüştürme aşamasıdır. Ben 3. Dönemi de bunun tamamen artık pratikte oluşmuş öngörüler üzerine oturtma ve pratikte gerçekleştirme süresi olarak değerlendiriyorum. Şu anda bulunduğum aşamayı böyle değerlendiriyorum. Yerel yönetimler programımız çok ideolojik olarak ya da çok dikte ettirilmiş olarak hazırlanmış değil. Yaşadığımız tecrübeler üzerinden, başarılı başarısız belediyelerimizi kategorize ettiğimizde ortaya çıkan sonuçlar üzerinden gelişmiş. Çok mu iyidir? Çok eksikliği var.

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