THE POLITICS OF CIVIC IDENTITY IN TURKEY 2011–17

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

The Politics of Civic Identity in Turkey: 2011–2017

When the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) succeeded in gaining significant support amongst the non-Kurdish electorate in the June 2015 election, many believed Türkiyeli*leşme* – the political strategy of appealing to the non-Kurdish electorate across Turkey through broad alliances with Turkish progressive movements – was the reason behind HDP's success. Due to this, much literature tended to emphasise how HDP's Türkiyelileşme discourse was a transformation from their more ethno-nationalist predecessor parties. Through a historical discursive analysis of pro-Kurdish political party activism since the 1960s until the emergence of the HDP, this thesis instead argues that the discourse displayed by Kurdish activists since the emergence of pro-Kurdish parties in the 1990s has always displayed a Türkiyelileşme discourse.

Moreover, this thesis analyses different periods where pro-Kurdish parties have utilised a more ethno-nationalist discourse and periods characterised by a Türkiyelileşme agenda. While many have interrpreted pro-Kurdish activism as either ethno-nationalist or Türkiyelileşme, I argue that party activism is defined by both extremes. While the more inclusive Türkiyelileşme characterises pro-Kurdish party activism during periods of relative peace and stability, when state coercion is used against the party, pro-Kurdish activists tend to 'return to their heartlands' and utilise a more ethno-nationalist political stance. Thus, this thesis aims to draw links between the level of pressure asserted on pro-Kurdish politics and the political strategy with which HDP and its predecessor parties have chosen to follow.

ÖZET

Türkiye'deki Yurttaşlık Kimlik Politikaları: 2011–2017

Halkların Demokratik Partisi (HDP) Haziran 2015 seçimlerinde Kürt olmayan seçmenlerden önemli derecede destek aldı – çoğunun inandığı Türkiyelileşme projesi – HDP, Kürt olmayan seçmeni ve Türk solunun bir kısmını da sürece dahil ettiği başarılı bir seçim dönemi geçirdi. Bunun sonucunda, birçok akademik yazıda HDP'nin Türkiyelileşme söyleminin daha önceki etnik-milliyetçi partilerin dönüşümü sonucu oluştuğunu vurgularlar. Bu tezde belirtilmek istenen Türkiyelilesme soyleminin esasında HDP den önceki Kürt partilerinde de her alan bir söylem olduğur .

Aynı zamanda, bu tezde daha önceki Kürt partileri etnik milliyetçi perspektifte değerlendirilmeye çalışılmıştır. Çoğunluğun tartıştığı gibi Kürt partiler ya etnik milliyetçi ya da Türkiyeli olabilir söylemine karşılık bu tezde partinin her iki söylemi de barındırabileceği üzerinde duruluyor. Devletin Kürt partilerin üzerindeki baskısı arttığında daha milliyetçi daha serbest, barış ortamlarında ise daha Türkiyeli söylemler geliştirdiklerini görebiliyoruz. Sonuç olarak bu tez HDP'nin ve öncesi Kürt partilerinin parti politikalarının baskı ile birlikte nasıl değişim gösterdiğini anlatmayı amaçlıyor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introduction

> "Tahir Elçi'yi öldüren devlet değil, devletsizliktir."
> - Selahattin Demirtaş, Tahir Elçi's funeral, 29th November 2015

"It was not the state that killed Tahir Elçi, but statelessness." On 28th November 2015, a few months after the peace process broke down, the prominent Kurdish human rights lawyer Tahir Elçi was gunned down in the Sur district of Diyarbakir. With these words ("Tahir Elçi'yi öldüren devlet değil, devletsizliktir"), the co-chair of HDP at the time, Selahattin Demirtaş, attempted to express the need for what he referred to as Türkiyeli*leşme*. Rejecting conventional constructions of a Turkish state at war with Kurdish separatists, Demirtaş instead lamented the absence of a functioning and legitimate political community, and expressed the need for such a community to secure the safety and prosperity of its citizens.

Since HDP's foundation as a party in 2012, they have sought to project themselves as a party representing the entirety of Turkey, thus expanding beyond their traditional ethnic base. Through Türkiyelileşme, the Turkish citizen was to be reconstituted as a citizen "of Turkey." This idea struck at the heart of the Kemalist conception of citizenship in Turkey – structured around the ethnic Türk – seeing to substitute it with a radically pluralist and civic ideal. For many like Demirtaş, Türkiyelileşme recognised the feeling of statelessness amongst Kurds, and attempted to

rectify this by articulating a vision for a state that acts as a representative of all identities in Turkey, not just the ethnic Turks.

Türkiyelileşme itself can be defined as a two-pronged project: on the one hand, it seeks to redefine the conception of citizenship in Turkey; on the other, it is part wider political strategy whereby the pro-Kurdish party attempts to appeal to the non-Kurdish electorate. Throughout the years of pro-Kurdish party activism since 1990, this latter strategy has led Kurdish politicians to ally themselves with left-leaning progressive voices across Turkey, by emphasising democratization and the need for a cohesive front against the authoritarian tendencies of the Turkish state. This strategic positioning on the part of HDP and its predecessor parties became more pronounced in the late 2000s and continued with the rise of HDP in 2012 until the peace process collapsed in 2015.

With the resumption of armed conflict that shows no signs of abating, the debate surrounding Türkiyelileşme has faded in recent years as the ruling government assert that the HDP is a separatist terrorist organisation (bölücü terör örgütünü), equivalent to the PKK. When Kurdish politicians proclaim an inclusive, non-separatist agenda, the government counters that this is simply a strategic ploy on the part of Kurds to bring them a step closer to secession. However, to understand the true nature of Türkiyelileşme discourse, it is important to recognise the historical and political context from which it emerged.

In the 2000s, after the ruling AKP assumed power, Turkish politics was dominated by the prospect of joining the European Union. The AKP themselves presided over a liberalization of civil society, and successfully introduced a series of

reforms that instilled a belief in a progressive future for the country. In this groundswell of liberal politics in the 2000s, pluralism was offered by the ruling-AKP as an alternative to the narrow nationalism that had dominated Turkey for decades.

The climax of this political moment was the protests that erupted in the summer of 2013, starting in Istanbul's Gezi Park but rapidly spreading across the country. The movement appeared to call for a more inclusive form of politics that took account of the multi-layered identities across Turkey. Nilüfer Göle argued that the protests 'rejected the politics of polarization and stigmatization, the Gezi Park movement reunited people across ancient divides' and succeeded in rehearsing 'new forms of citizenship' (Göle, *Public Space,* 2013). I became fascinated by the explosion of pluralist identities and began to become interested in Türkiyelileşme and HDP's attempt as a party to incorporate such a complex array of identities into a 'big tent' movement. "Türkiyelileşme meant turning away from a struggle for solely more rights for the Kurds and instead calling for a democratization of Turkey as a whole," Ümit Kıvanç argues. "It was the Gezi uprising that contributed to the change as different ethnic Turks found themselves side by side on the barricades with the Kurds… for the first time it became possible to form a party that would transcend the traditional boundaries of the Turkish and Kurdish left" (Kıvanç, 2015).

Where did this new discourse come from? The current thesis began as an attempt to answer this question. The HDP is generally supposed to have emerged from an armed movement that had engaged in a bloody war with Turkey for more than 30 years. Traditionally, ethnic insurgent groups have pursued a variety of policies that seek to delegitimise elections; in the case of Sinn Fein, this has meant a policy of abstention in

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Westminster, while Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and FARC in Colombia have engaged in electoral sabotage or boycott. In contrast, HDP and early Kurdish political organisations have consistently used elections as an alternative strategy to armed struggle in pressurising the Turkish state to grant the particularist demands of Kurds. Türkiyelileşme necessitates a total commitment to working within Turkey's political system.

During my research, I began to recognise the polarization of opinion on such a project. While many Kurds saw Türkiyelileşme as an exciting and achievable goal in the context of the peace process, others felt angry and betrayed by a project which appeared to focus more on transforming Turkey than on the rights of Kurds. Such critics asserted that the very nature of the project failed to address the need for an anti-assimilationist political front due to the state's assault on Kurdish cultural rights; they struggled to accept the rejection of independence that Türkiyelileşme implies.

Over time, this interest and debate surrounding Türkiyelileşme led me to engage with the two poles which form the lifeblood of the Kurdish movement. On one pole are the Kurdish nationalists, who after decades of demanding independence, refuse to relinquish such a demand. For them, integration and assimilation into the Turkish political arena is unthinkable, and the only solution to the conflict is an independent Kurdish state. At the other pole lies those advocating Türkiyelileşme – these Kurds believe that demands for independence are not only unrealistic, but also dangerous in that creating a nation-state would fail to resolve the political conflict in its entirety. Instead, they favour a political strategy that attempts to link with disparate struggles

across Turkey and thereby project Kurdish politics into the broader tradition of radical, counter-hegemonic movements.

However, when discussing Türkiyelileşme, there is a false narrative that the project came out of this liberal, more pluralist so-called 'Gezi generation.' Instead, in this thesis I argue that this debate between Kurdish nationalists and those advocating for some form of Türkiyelileşme has always been present since the earliest days of Kurdish activism. While the Kurdish movement has attempted to diffuse such tensions by appeasing both sides, these two poles have remained and continue to dominate the discourse within the Kurdish political arena. In recent years, as the peace process collapsed and the AKP's liberalism has descended into illiberalism, much of this discourse has faded under accusations of separatism. However, this thesis argues, such political debate continues to shape Kurdish party activism.

Furthermore, through tracing the origins of Kurdish activism in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the period after the emergence of legal pro-Kurdish political parties from 1990 onwards, I argue that Kurdish political activism has displayed a remarkable ideological continuity. While the PKK's initial demand for independence suggests Türkiyelileşme was not present within the discourse, Kurdish political activism always displayed characteristics of the project in that they actively sought to engage and work within Turkey's legal structures. Early Kurdish activists active in the Turkish Worker's Party (TİP) as well as Kurdish political actors that emerged in the 1990s were less interested in secessionist politics; instead, they devoted their energies to steering left-wing activism away from monoculturalism of Turkish nationalism that was so dominant at the time and towards a more pluralist discourse that recognised the multiplicitous

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nature of identities across Turkey. As legal Kurdish parties became properly established after the emergence of the first pro-Kurdish party, Halkın Emek Partisi (HEP: People's Labour Party) in 1990, this discourse of Türkiyelileşme became more thoroughly developed as they allied themselves with the Turkish left. Throughout this period, I argue that Kurdish party activism can be seen as Türkiyelileşme avant la lettre.

After HDP's emergence, the debate surrounding Türkiyelileşme became more prevalent and open, leading many to assert that this is what differentiates it from its predecessor parties. Academic literature tends to place emphasis on the PKK and Öcalan's ideological conversion to 'democratic autonomy' as the major influencing factor in explaining the emergence of HDP's discourse. However, this thesis challenges such an assertion, and instead I suggest that the influence of legal pro-Kurdish parties has been undervalued. Thus, as well as arguing that the tradition of legal pro-Kurdish party politics has shown ideological continuity and pursued a strategy of Türkiyelileşme avant la lettre, this thesis questions the focus with which scholars have placed on the armed wing of the Kurdish movement at the expense of legal Kurdish activism. Instead of the PKK influencing pro-Kurdish political parties through their embracement of 'democratic autonomy', I suggest the success of pro-Kurdish political parties in the 1990s influenced the PKK to engage more thoroughly with legal avenues to assert political pressure through party politics.

However, despite this ideological continuity, the HDP differs from predecessor parties in the composition of its membership. While the six pro-Kurdish parties[1] that

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[1] *Halkın Emek Partisi* (HEP, the People's Labour Party), *Demokrasi Partisi (*DEP, the Democracy Party), *Halkın Demokrasi Partisi (*HADEP, the People's Democratic Party), *Demokratik Halk Partisi* (DEHAP,

preceded HDP have broadly represented a Türkiyelileşme agenda, their members and voters were predominantly Kurdish. Although these parties did attempt to include Turkish socialist voices within their ranks, and to make alliances with other parties, such initiatives invariably failed. The party's parliamentarians were also mostly Kurds. In contrast, while pro-government voices have attempted to paint the HDP as a political wing of the PKK, the party itself has an impressively wide array of voices and demographics from across Turkey. Included among their representatives are Islamists and Socialists, Kurdish nationalists and Armenians, Yezidis and Assyrians. They have also embraced liberal academics dismissed from employment under the Erdoğan regime - the current co-President Sezai Temeli is one such example. This wide range of voices and identities represented within HDP means it is hard to interpret them as the political wing of the PKK, or even as separatists. Instead, such a transformation of a party representing a wide array of political and ethnic identities, rather than just the Kurdish identity, shows how the project of Türkiyelileşme has attempted to build a new political left based on the "marginalised majority."[2]

However, maintaining such a wide array of political and ideological perspectives is a delicate balance to achieve. My thesis attempts to scrutinise this project and delve into the dynamics between the different forces present within the HDP. I seek to understand the political disputes that have taken place, as well as how this has shaped the direction and agenda of the party. From November 2018 – February 2019, I conducted 14 interviews with a range of HDP MPs, activists and journalists in Ankara

the Democratic People's Party), *Demokratik Toplum Partisi* (DTP, the Democratic Society Party), and *Barış ve Demokrası Partisi* (BDP, the Peace and Democratic Party)

[2] This term was first used by the former co-chair, a senior member of the HDP, during a personal interview. See Chapter 2 for an elaboration of the term.

and Istanbul. In this, my thesis focuses on elite voices within the HDP to understand how senior party members portray themselves and their party. All the interviews have been conducted within a qualitative research method, and given the interpretative research paradigm of this thesis subject, I chose an unstructured format to my interviews. Alongside such primary research material, this thesis also offers a historical perspective where I examine the tradition of pro-Kurdish party activism and seek to understand whether HDP can be seen as something entirely new or instead a continuation of such a tradition.

It is important to note the testing and difficult political circumstances in which this research has been conducted. A state crackdown against the party– with more than 12 MPs in jail and nearly 10,000 arrests of party members since the breakdown of peace in 2015 – has led to certain limitations and restrictions for researchers. Alongside such severe political oppression, a number of MPs have been conducting hunger strikes to protest the government's refusal to allow Öcalan's lawyers and family members to visit, which has further isolated the party.

Such a political environment has led to significant challenges for researchers such as myself, exploring contemporary attitudes within the Kurdish movement. Interviewees are unwilling to speak freely. On the one hand, they are wary of identifying themselves with 'radical' positions, for fear of state reprisals. On the other, I have observed a culture of political defensiveness amongst members which has meant an unwillingness to openly discuss some of the challenges the party has faced. One example is a Turkish HDP MP, who has a significant public profile: I know him to have been privately critical of the party's unconditional support for the Kurdish hunger

strikes, but he was not comfortable articulating them to an outside researcher, due to the political pressures imposed both on and by his party. Thus, if a more liberal and democratic environment prevailed, such research would undoubtedly be able to delve deeper into the political discussions and disagreement that have occurred within the party. In this way, such research would have been easier to conduct prior to the breakdown of peace in 2015.

Chapter 2 focuses on defining contemporary understanding of Türkiyelileşme and seeks to analyse the project both in terms of challenging conceptions of citizenship in Turkey and as a form of a political strategy on the part of pro-Kurdish legal activism. Incorporating a series of interviews I conducted to help contextualise such a project, I analyse both the origins of such a term, as well as the broader criticisms that are associated with it.

Using party manifestos and secondary sources, Chapters 3 and 4 offer a historical analysis of the emergence of pro-Kurdish political party activism prior to the establishment of HDP. Chapter 3 focuses on the period prior to the 1980 coup when early Kurdish intellectuals first vocalised Kurdish demands. I analyse how Kurds sought to ally themselves to the growing socialist cause through the emergence of the Turkish Worker's Party (TIP) to draw attention to the Kurdish question. Moreover, after analysing such a period of cooperation between Kurdish intellectuals and Turkish left in the 1960s, the chapter examines the period of separation and radicalisation of Kurdish nationalism in the 1970s.

Chapter 4 begins by explaining the effects of the 1980 military coup on Turkish politics, before exploring the pro-Kurdish party activism that developed after the establishment of the Peoples' Labour Party (HEP) in 1990. I analyse six different pro-Kurdish parties stretching from 1990-2012. Throughout this chapter, I seek to draw parallels with HDP, not only in terms of state repression, but also in ideological approach: I argue that the political programs and strategies of the HEP and subsequent pro-Kurdish parties should be understood as Türkiyelileşme avant le lettre.

In Chapter 5, I seek to analyse the emergence of HDP in 2012 and examine the party's development prior to and following the breakdown of the peace process in the summer of 2015. This chapter attempts to draw parallels with the experiences of previous pro-Kurdish parties. I trace the fortunes of Türkiyelileşme discourse through the early electoral successes of the HDP in 2014 and 2015, before the escalation of armed conflict in the south east forced the HDP to retreat to a more Kurd-centric position. I analyse such a transformation of the political context from peace to war, and how these changing circumstance posed significant challenges for the party.

Having traced the historical trajectory of pro-Kurdish party activism from the 1960s until the present, Chapter 6 provides a more thorough analysis of HDP's perspective on democracy. I draw parallels and consistencies between HDP and HEP in order to illustrate my argument that the emergence of pro-Kurdish parties in the early 1990s established the ideological blueprint which subsequent parties built on. Furthermore, this chapter investigates the emergence of a new discourse in the Kurdish movement, centred upon 'democratic autonomy'. I argue that, despite the emphasis upon

political identity in lieu of ethnic identity claims, the militants' engagement in armed struggle necessarily participated in the Kurdish-nationalist tradition.

Lastly, Chapter 7 returns to the discussion of the multiple political identities and subjectivities which form part of the HDP. Employing political theory to explain such a party model, I look at a range of different issues that offers insights into the dynamics between different identities and struggles that underpin the political culture of the HDP. I analyse the structural components of the party which aims to allow for disparate struggles to collate within the party; I interview Turkish socialist HDP MPs to understand why they believe it is important to participate in a political marriage with the Kurdish movement; I also examine the so-called 'Kürdistani discourse' and their critique of Türkiyelileşme; finally, I analyse the productive tension which shapes this political culture, and argue that such tension contributes to a dynamic political discourse.

1.2 Literature review

Until recently, scholarship into Kurdish history and society was limited due to the prevalence of official discourse in Turkey making the scope for studies on Kurdish society limited. However, in recent years, scholarship on Kurdish studies has become a burgeoning field. Much of the literature has focused on the Kurdish national movement and the development of Kurdish nationalism. Some literature provided historical accounts of the conflict between Turkey and the PKK, such as Taspinar (2005), McDowall (1996), and Barkey and Fuller (1998). This literature tends to draw attention to the modernization process and how that transformed and gave rise to Kurdish

nationalism and its associated political movements. Likewise, Gunter (2008) and Güneş's (2012) work has applied a historical framework to produce an analysis of the PKK conflict. Güneş's book in particular draws attention to questions of political identity and how the PKK's emerging democratic discourse in the early 2000s transformed Kurdish nationalism thoroughly. His work analyses the transformation of Kurdish national discourse from the ethnic identity it was associated with in the 1970s to a more dynamic form of political identity.

With regard to identity construction, much of the literature has framed Kurdish identity formation in relation to the Turkish state, such as Gunter who says "Kurdish nationalism largely developed in the 20th century as a stateless ethnic reaction against repressive 'official state nationalisms' of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria" (2007: 15). Likewise, Van Bruissenen argued that Turkish state oppression against Kurds actually strengthened Kurdish culture, which was exactly what they tried to destroy (2003: 57). Thus, scholarship tends to consider Kurdish nationalism as a response or reaction to Turkish nationalism's tendency to suppress Kurdish identity. Consequently, the rise of Kurdish identity is perceived in tandem with Turkish nationalism, and thereby intertwined.

As this thesis attempts to analyse HDP's project of Türkiyelileşme which attempts to reformulate the "sovereign" national identity away from "Turkishness" and towards a more pluralist understanding of identity, Abbas Vali's interpretation of the modern state as suppressing ethnic or cultural differences as a means to produce a uniform "sovereign identity" is instructive. Defining Kurdish identity as a "nonsovereign" identity in Turkey's civil society, he argues that conditions of

citizenship have been defined by Kemalist Turkey which has sought to "specify the ethnic boundaries" (Vali, 1998). Thus, rather than conforming to such suppression of difference, Türkiyelileşme attempts to celebrate the cultural and ethnic differences of Turkey and use that to redefine conceptions of citizenship in Turkey.

Although the first pro-Kurdish political party emerged in 1990, only recently has scholarship attempted to engage fully with Kurdish democratic politics. The most authoritative study is Nicole Watt's book (2010), which traces the rise of pro-Kurdish parties in the 1990s, as well as examining how Kurdish activism sought to construct an alternative 'Kurdish subject' through their control of municipalities in the south-east in the 2000s. Although her account is informative on the normalisation of Kurdishness within the public realm through funding cultural projects, her study does not provide analysis regarding how Kurdish political participation has challenged concepts of citizenship through notions of pluralism. Likewise, Demir (2005) and Ölmez (1995) provide historical overviews of Kurdish political activism in Turkey, but do not address the emerging discourses that emerge through such activism.

Özcan's book (2006) analyses the impact the PKK had on Kurdish nationalism, and the discursive transition of the Kurdish movement's ideology over time. However, he focuses on the PKK at the expense of legal Kurdish political activism, which means his study lacks an analysis of how Kurdish political activism has informed democratic discourses in Turkey. Akkaya and Jongerden's article traces the ideology of the Kurdish movement from a Leninist understanding of self-determination towards a project for radical democracy. They argue that democratic autonomy is in fact based on the idea of developing "politics beyond the state, political organisation beyond the party, and

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political subjectivity beyond class" (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2012). Rather than capturing state power through armed struggle, they contend that through a total restructuration of the movement, the PKK have expanded their scope to challenge the centralist tradition in the Turkish political system and the radical democracy project ultimately aims to render borders flexible and irrelevant by advocating a system that goes beyond existing borders. While the article offers insight into the ideological transformation of the movement, it fails to account for the inherent contradictions within the ideology of democratic autonomy. Analysing the breakdown of peace and declaration of democratic autonomy in towns across the south-east by Kurdish militants, Leezenberg (2016) offers a more balanced analysis by bringing attention to the ambiguities of democratic autonomy. The article argues that the ambiguity within Öcalan's own definition of this ideology has led to contradictory interpretations by HDP officials and Kurdish militants.

Recently, there has been much literature on the HDP and its attempt to become a challenger party for the Turkish Left. Güneş (2017) traces the history of Turkey's socialist movement and argues that HDP's success in establishing an alliance with such a movement means that the party has achieved where other socialist parties have failed. A whole new body of literature analyses the cooperation and alliances that HDP have built, and broadly argue that HDP have succeeded in creating a counterhegemonic party that challenges the uniform, centralist nature of the Turkish state (Burç, 2018; Yörük, 2018; Grigoriadis, 2016). However, much of the literature interprets the rise of the HDP as a break from the tradition of pro-Kurdish parties that preceded it. Grigoriadis (2016) argues that, unlike the previous parties, "the HDP ceased to be simply a 'pro-Kurdish'

party and aimed to address the grievances and concerns of all dispossessed Turkish citizens." Likewise, Yörük (2018) claims that the "HDP emerged when the Kurdish political movement fundamentally changed its strategy." Moreover, Emek (2015) argues that HDP's establishment marked the transformation and the "new image" from "an ethnic/regionalist party of Kurds into a radical democratic party of Turkey."

While such a characterisation of the HDP as representing an ideological break from previous pro-Kurdish parties pertains certain truths – namely regarding the composition of party deputies, which makes the party more thoroughly pluralist in representing a broader range of identities – in this thesis I argue that there is much more ideological continuity between HDP and the earliest pro-Kurdish political parties. Scholarship has tended to overplay and exaggerate the linkage between PKK and pro-Kurdish political parties, leading to analyses that draw parallels between the armed movement's ideological paradigm shift to HDP's democratization project. O'Francis (2017) describes the relationship between the two as "constructive ambiguity" whereby social and emotional proximity is juxtaposed by structural differentiation. However, despite such a crossover where both groups draw from the same reservoir of support and reference the same universe (Barkey 1998: 136), such analysis fails to take into account the influence of previous pro-Kurdish parties that established themselves in Turkish parliamentary politics since the 1990s. Thus, I argue that rather than perceiving HDP's vision as one influenced by the PKK, the party's program of radical democracy can be traced back to HEP's political program in 1990.

In order to explain the different groups within HDP, I employ Laclau's definition of a radical democracy which "attempts to organise the political space around the

universality of the community without hierarchies and distinctions" (Laclau, 2001: 4). Whereas Turkish nation-building has sought to constitute one identity out of a heterogeneous field, the transformative nature of HDP's project is in its utilization of Laclau's alternative tradition of democracy whereby democracy involves respect for differences through a popular incorporation of different political identities and subjectivities. Thus, through Türkiyelileşme, we see the HDP attempting to offer a path of radical democracy that focuses specifically on the marginalization of Kurds and other identities through a participatory and pluralistic vision of democratic society in Turkey. Furthermore, I question whether HDP's manufacturing of a new political identity through identities such as 'bizler' and 'yeni yaşam' can be seen as example of Laclau's definition of populism.

Due to HDP's constellation of dispersed identities and struggles, there have been some studies on the party using Laclau and Mouffe's theorisation of radical democracy. They argue that given the decline of traditional form of political identities, a new Left movement needs to create a new political subject based on the logic of equality that unifies different struggles against oppression. An alternative form of radical democracy can occur by "an expansion of the logic of equality to increasingly wider spheres of social relations – social and economic equality, racial equality, gender equality, etc. From this point of view democracy constitutively involves respect of difference" (Laclau, 2001: 4).

By looking at HDP's approach to the Kurdish conflict and the peace process, Tekdemir (2016) employs both Laclau and Mouffe to argue that HDP embodies that of an agonistic actor through the mobilization of a collective pluralistic will. Mouffe's

agonistic approach rejects the Habermasian liberal approach to peace building that aims

to reach a consensus by eliminating conflict and stifling difference, and instead

approaches the question by acknowledging the inevitable existence of differences. Thus,

rather than a liberal process which excludes various groups, Mouffe's approach aims to

produce a 'conflictual consensus' that embraces a form of pluralism where conflict is

actively deliberated over (Mouffe, 2013). Using such a theoretical basis, Tekdemir

argues that HDP have attempted to create a collective pluralist identity when engaging

with the reconciliation process:

> The Kurdish political movement, represented by the HDP, has realized that their political demands cannot be met without also taking into account the democratic demands of other groups. This collective will, 'us/bizler', as a new political identity seeks inclusive pluralism beyond the liberal model in a new articulation of hegemony. The HDP's left-leaning populist discourse emerged as a challenge to that of the central mainstream parties, namely the AKP's right-wing populism and the CHP's Kemalism, by offering as an 'outsider' agonistic alternative to peace building organization and approach to conflict in Turkey (Tekdemir, 2016).

This can be further articulated by a Laclauian understanding of populism: Rejecting the

much 'maligned' concept of populism whereby the identification of 'the people' is

wrongly associated as a group with base passions that can be excited by demagogues,

Laclau understood populism as,

> A form of articulating popular identities… by way of the dichotomisation of the political space setting a 'plebs' that asserts itself as the only legitimate 'populus' in opposition to symbolically-grouped elites. A new border is drawn across the political battlefield, depicting a new 'them' in opposition to which a popular identity is produced that casts aside the metaphors that previously divided the people (Errejón, 2014).

But importantly, as Panizza (2005, 11) states, it is also about the creation of new

political actors:

> It is not just about the crisis of representation in which people have weaned off their old identities, and embrace a new 'popular' one. It is also about the beginning of representation allowing those who have never been represented because of their class, religion, ethnicity or geographical location to be acknowledged as political actors.

Thus, Laclau and Mouffe theorization on a new left and populism allows for an understanding of how a party uniting a series of disparate struggles, each with their own particularist political identities, can come together under a unified banner and effectively be greater than the sum of its parts. In this way, I interpret HDP's project as "the linking together of different identities and political forces into a common project, and the creation of new social orders from a variety of dispersed elements" (Howarth, 2000). Not only does such theory help understand the constellation of disparate political identities and subjectivities contained within HDP, but also helps explain the creation of a new popular identity that acknowledges oppressed identities as political actors in their own right.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINING TÜRKİYELİLEŞME

In this chapter, I attempt to dissect the meaning of Türkiyelileşme and understand its objectives as a political philosophy. As well as defining the term as a form of political strategy, I also analyse the origins of such a term and the discourse surrounding the necessity of such a project. Throughout the chapter, I bring in perspectives from HDP politicians and journalists that I interviewed, and scrutinise the ideological foundation and evolution of such a term. As has been discussed in the introduction, Türkiyelileşme can be seen as a two-fold strategy which attempts to redefine citizenship in Turkey as well as forge an alliance with the Turkish left as a long-term political strategy. With regard to citizenship, the project hopes to reformulate the very conception of what it is to be a Turk away from an ethnic identity and towards a more pluralist civic understanding of citizenship. The strategic element of Türkiyelileşme which attempts to find allies amongst liberals and left-leaning non-Kurdish electorate can be seen in HDP's assertion that their party is a project to forge a whole new left political force in Turkey.

With regard to citizenship, Türkiyelileşme challenges the traditional Kemalist understanding that places the ethnic Türk at the centre. Mesut Yeğen argues that Kurds have historically been considered as "prospective-Turks" who, through assimilationist practises, have been "invited to become Turkish." However, he also suggests that this process has always left open the idea that "Kurds may not be Turkish… When this happened Kurds were considered outside the circle of Turkishness" (Yeğen, 2009, p.598). When Demirtaş claimed that Tahir Elçi's killer was statelessness, he was

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articulating this ambiguity whereby Kurds are only prospective-Turks and thereby only potential sovereign citizens who cannot rely on the state's security. Such a concept is exactly what Türkiyelileşme challenges: not only does it attempt to strip Turkishness from the concept of citizenship, but it replaces it with a more pluralistic Türkiyeli identity that incorporates all "nonsovereign/subordinate identities" into "sovereign identities" (Vali, 1998).

Beyond citizenship, the project has come to be more broadly interpreted as a political strategy whereby the Kurdish movement seeks to ally themselves with left-leaning and progressive forces in Turkey to effect political change through a program of democratization. In many ways, the project seeks to redefine the tradition of pro-Kurdish political parties away from that of a regional party representing purely Kurdish interests, complete with a geographical delimitation, and towards a politics that focuses on the entirety of Turkey and thereby cements the party on the national stage. Furthermore, by creating an alliance with Turkish progressive forces, HDP's project is also seen as a wholesale rejection of the Kurdish movement's original goal of independence, and instead attempts to project themselves as a party that represents the entirety of Turkey, not simply the Kurdish regions. Moreover, such a commitment to representing the entirety of Turkey also opens up new avenues for Kurds in that it transforms Kurds not simply as potential leaders for the Kurdish regions, but for the whole country. Throughout the history of legal Kurdish political activism, activists have focused on legitimizing Kurdish demands by using a framework of improving democracy in Turkey. In recent years, with the rise of HDP, some of suggested that Türkiyelileşme implies an end to the particularist focus on the Kurdish issue with a transformation

towards a political program that includes the Kurdish issue as part of the wider issue of

Turkey's democratic structure. Thus, while previous pro-Kurdish parties were

particularist parties with a primary focus on the Kurdish issue, Türkiyelileşme is a much

more ambitious project that aims to use the Kurdish issue as a platform with the primary

goal of transforming the entirety of Turkey into a fully-fledged democratic nation.

The term Türkiyelileşme was first used by Ahmet Türk in 2007, a Kurdish

politician who was president of the pro-Kurdish Demokratik Toplum Partisi (DTP:

Democratic Society Party) at the time. Facing accusations of not being a party of

Turkey, and instead being a regional party only representing the Kurdish minority, Türk

used the term to defend DTP against such accusations. The accusations levelled on the

party by the state implied a separatist agenda on the part of DTP, and thus Türk sought

to allay such a charge by expressing their wish to be a party that represents the whole of

Turkey, not just their Kurdish ethnic base.

Given the success of HDP in reaching the national agenda, and thus the party's

success in challenging the concept that pro-Kurdish parties are simply regional parties

representing Kurds in the south-east, the project is most commonly associated with

HDP. This is something which is disputed by a number of HDP members, who claim

that such a concept has always been there and the failure for people to understand this is

because the Turkish public had simply failed to comprehend pro-Kurdish parties'

strategy prior to the rise of the HDP. A HDP MP with Turkish origins, explained to me:

> HDP and the pro-Kurdish political parties have always been a Türkiyeli party
> pursing Türkiyelileşme, so I don't like how such a concept is being treated as
> something new with the rise of HDP. In terms of becoming 'national', pro-
> Kurdish legal parties have always campaigned for issues across the entirety of

Turkey. The goal of Türkiyelileşme is essentially to transform Turks into 'Türkiyeli' citizens; this is what HDP is trying to do. The only difference between the HDP and previous parties is people began to listen to HDP – this was partly contextual as the peace process allowed for such discussions to take place and for Turks to engage directly with HDP's message. So in this sense, the only transformation is HDP have found a practical way to articulate and achieve a Türkiyeli position (HDP MP, personal interview, 2019).

Many associate the term with Abdullah Öcalan himself, claiming that it was his

transformation after his incarceration in 1999 that led to a shift in focus of the PKK

towards one which attempted to build a democratic republic in Turkey. An experienced

Turkish leftist figure and former co-leader of HDP, argues that Öcalan alone developed

Türkiyelileşme:

When we look at Türkiyelileşme in its entirety, we have to credit Öcalan. Without him, the Kurdish movement would still be demanding for an independent state, and thus Türkiyelileşme would not be on the agenda. Öcalan successfully transformed the debate within the movement by convincing the cadres to accept the formation of an entirely new party in the form of the HDP whereby the Kurdish movement's civilian cadres would accept an all-Turkey party together with Turkey's left democratic forces. When we go back to his works on democratic autonomy and the democratic republic, we find he speaks about a conjuncture whereby if the nation state is prepared to admit the existence of multi-cultural, multi-national society, and if the Kurdish forces admit to try their chances through peaceful means and let aside their separatist claims, then we have a prospect for democratic autonomy and then we can achieve a shared country. This is essentially what Türkiyelileşme is trying to achieve (HDP former co-leader, personal interview, 2018).

There are contesting interpretations of Türkiyelileşme. The liberal interpretation is that

HDP have sought to challenge the uniform, ethnic conception of citizenship in Turkey,

and replace it with a multicultural understanding based purely civic terms. However, one

academic I interviewed argued that such an interpretation is misleading, and argues that

Türkiyelileşme calls for a more radical transformation of identity:

I don't think Türkiyelileşme is somehow reflecting liberal Turkish sentiments within politics. That's how most people have understood it. Instead Türkiyelileşme is three things: firstly, that all of the citizens in Turkey, and

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especially Kurds, are candidates for ruling Turkey- they are not candidates only for ruling Kurdistan, but for the whole of Turkey. The second dimension is that if Türkiyelileşme represents Turks, it should definitely represent marginalized Turks- ones that have been marginalized by economies, by patriarchy, by Islamism and by the nation-state. Lastly, Türkiyelileşme means reconstituting the Turk. It's not reflecting the Turk as it is, but reconstituting both the Turk and the Kurd, thus reconstituting the electoral base itself. In this way, Türkiyelileşme transforms the various identities in Turkey, as well as the state's relationships to them (Turkish academic, personal interview, 2018).

Thus, the Türkiyeli identity has a more radical interpretation whereby it represents all the marginalised people of Turkey while also attempting to reformulate citizenship not simply as an identity based on race, religion or culture, but rather citizenship based on the rights of citizens. Central to this concept is that a Türkiyeli identity primarily represents all the identities that have thus far been neglected or marginalised by Turkish state – the women, the workers, the non-Turks and non-Muslims. Such a political philosophy brings to mind the idea of a new model of representation whereby "those who have never been represented because of their class, religion, ethnicity… [are] to be acknowledged as political actors" (Panizza, 2005, p.11). It has led to some arguing that HDP is the party of the "marginalised majority". The former HDP co-leader explained such a concept as,

> Through Türkiyelileşme, HDP attempts to redefine Turkish citizenship not based on race, religion language of culture. Instead, HDP proposes citizenship based on the rights of citizens. Therefore, this also makes Turkey a party of all the neglected elements of Turkish and Kurdish society. When we count all the neglected identities of Turkey, then we have the majority of society. The women, the workers, all non-Turks, all non-Muslims, all marginalised sexual identities etc. – when we bring them all together, we find that they make the majority of Turkey. In this we are the party of the "marginalised majority". In this our major concern is not preserving Turkey as such, but transforming it into our vision (HDP former co-leader, personal interview, 2018).

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Another HDP MP of Turkish descent who I interviewed believes that Türkiyelileşme is not simply about forging a new identity but is a broader political philosophy that rejects how identity itself has been seen throughout Turkey's Kemalist era:

> For me, Türkiyelileşme is about creating a new identity, whereby all people from different backgrounds and identities share the same rights. In one sense, it could be interpreted as creating a more pluralist identity, but I think it's important to emphasise that that this new identity identifies with those most oppressed people in Turkey over the last 90 years. In this, the term thoroughly rejects the Kemalist way of thinking in terms of identity which so many people feel alienated from. Secondly, I believe this project challenges the male-dominated interpretation of Turkishness (Türklük). Therefore, as a party, we have successfully challenged this by developing an identity based on gender equality – this is why we have the 'eş' (partner) system of one male and one female representative throughout our organisation. This very system enlarges the identity of citizenship beyond the patriarchal, male dominated Turkish identity of citizenship and is therefore transformative (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018).

One of the peculiar characteristics of Türkiyelileşme is the wide array of definitions with which politicians define it. This HDP MP's definition underlines this when she talks about HDP's gender policy, and how Türkiyelileşme is attempting to transform the understanding of Turkish identity beyond the confines of a male-dominated definition. While Türkiyelileşme has clearly come to represent the rejection of full independence and the reconstitution of identity away from an ethnic interpretation, another important element within the concept is its transformative nature. The term itself suggests a transition, a journey which has yet to be completed. It is for this reason that every politician I interviewed emphasised the process and HDP's approach which isn't simply about suggesting policy, but rather transforming society into its own vision.

However, despite many politicians' adherence and commitment to the transformation that Türkiyelileşme proposes, there remains a certain negativity behind the term as it implies a level of assimilation from Kurds into the Turkish fold. A Kurdish

journalist told me that while Türkiyelileşme is disliked by many Kurds, the close ties

between Turks and Kurds makes any other strategy impossible to obtain:

> Actually Türkiyelileşme is a concept that many Kurds dislike because it implies
> a step back from the goal of succession from Turkey. The Kurds natural
> disposition is an independent state, and this explains why many are opposed to
> Türkiyelileşme. However, the social, political and economic realities mean that
> the dream of independence is unobtainable. An independent state will always
> remain a dream. Because of this, Türkiyelileşme is not just an aim, but rather an
> absolute necessity for Kurds. I want to emphasise that such a position is not a
> form of surrender, but rather a necessity. I think the roots of the Kurdish struggle
> aims to achieve full equality for Kurds as a people, and in many ways, this
> demand is crystallised within Türkiyelileşme (Kurdish journalist, personal
> interview, 2019).

Although this journalist is committed to the project of Türkiyelileşme, it is clear that

despite its relative success in building a new political front, Türkiyelileşme is not

universally popular amongst Kurds. Following the crackdown on both the party and

Kurdish activists that followed the breakdown of the peace process and eruption of

violence in the south-east, many Kurds have claimed that such a policy has failed due to

the lack of solidarity that Turks have extended to Kurds when it was most needed. For

many Kurds, Türkiyelileşme didn't simply mean a shared political project electorally,

but a shared understanding of the oppression Kurds feel they have endured at the hands

of the Turkish state and a need to offer solidarity during such oppressive cycles. One

Diyarbakir-based Kurdish journalist told me that Kurds became more alienated with the

project when, following the breakdown of the peace process, the Turkish state began

"besieging Kurdish towns and nobody in Turkey cared (Kurdish journalist, personal

interview, 2019). Thus, for many Türkiyelileşme is not a one way process whereby

Kurds relinquish their dream of statehood to work with progressive Turkish political

movements. Instead, Turks need to break free from the statist narrative and extend their

solidarity to Kurds. However, in the minds of many Kurds, such a language never appeared and therefore many have claimed Türkiyelileşme a failure. The Diyarbakir-based journalist told me that this may explain the universal rejection of the concept in the south-east:

> I think Kurd's own view of Türkiyelileşme is somewhat informed by how they perceive their own relationship with the state. In the south-east, we are less culturally assimilated, and our relationship to the state is also informed by living here. Maybe for Kurds living in Istanbul, the greater degree of integration means they are happy for HDP to become an all-Turkey party. But for us, Türkiyelileşme represented a dislocation of our party whereby the party's focus shifted to convincing Turks of the value of HDP. In this way, when we criticise Türkiyelileşme, we're simply asking for our party back (Kurdish journalist, personal interview, 2019).

Thus, the Türkiyelileşme critique contains a certain fear of the loss of ownership of their party. An alternative, more nationalist, critique of Türkiyelileşme also draws on the dangers of assimilation that such a project threatens, but also questions the necessity for the HDP to ally themselves so fully with the Turkish Left. One German-based journalist argued such a project shows how Kurdish politics in general has been overrun by the Turkish Left ("Kürt siyasetinde sol kayyımlar", Garip, 2018). For these nationalist inclined Kurds, they see the domination of the Turkish left as proof that HDP is no longer a true representative of Kurds. While the HDP makes clear in their manifesto that they support mother tongue education for Kurds and other minorities, nationalist Kurds believe not enough has been done to improve cultural rights for Kurds. Thus, HDP's political approach is seen as too ideological, and they reject the transformation of Kurdish identity from an ethnic identity to a dynamic political identity (Güneş, 2012).

Such controversies surrounding the term underline the difficulties with which HDP have attempted to instil a Türkiyeli identity and transition into a 'party of Turkey.'

While much focus on the term has been on its attempt to reconstitute the Turk, which is roundly applauded for challenging the "Turkishness" of citizenship in Turkey, the divisiveness of the concept stems from its attempt to reconstitute the Kurd. While Kurds in Turkey's west, generally more integrated, are comfortable with embracing the political identity constructed by the Kurdish movement at the expense of the ethnic one, those that place greater concern on preserving Kurdish culture and language fear the inevitable assimilation that Türkiyelileşme will inevitable bring.

CHAPTER 3

THE EARLY YEARS: KURDISH ACTIVISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP

WITH THE TURISH LEFT 1960-80

Having analysed and framed the discourse surrounding the concept of Türkiyelileşme, this chapter explores the period of Kurdish political activism from 1960-80. Throughout the chapter, I seek to examine the discourse articulated by Kurdish activists, and whether such a discourse can be considered as the ideological routes of Türkiyelileşme. While there has been much scholarship within academic texts on the rise of the Kurdish movement and the ideology espoused by them, as well as on the birth of the PKK, there is scant literature on the importance of the Turkish left in forming the basis of what we know as the Kurdish movement today. Considering this thesis seeks to analyse and scrutinize the HDP's broad-based alliance between the Kurdish movement and the wider Turkish Left, it is important to first look at the period of cooperation between Kurdish activists and the Turkish left that began in the 1960s and continued through the 1970s.

The period that is analysed in this chapter stretches from 1960 to 1980. In 1960, a coup took place which, unlike all other coups in Turkey's history, led to measures that aimed to promote the democratization of society. Amongst the major changes was the implementation of a new constitution in 1961 that was the most liberal in Turkey's history, which in turn created opportunities for left-leaning activists to express and publish their views. For the first time in Turkey's history, various leftists, trade-unionists and Marxists could operate legally, and this quickly crystallized under the banner of

Türkiye İşçi Partisi (TIP, The Workers Party of Turkey), which was established in 1961. Behice Boran, one of the leading members of TIP, explained that "it was only following 27 May 1960 [coup that adopted the new constitution for Turkey] that socialism in Turkey became a legitimate current of political thought and a political movement" (Boran, 1970, p.59).

The 1960s and 70s were marked by profound changes across Turkey which led to a rise in political consciousness. It was in this period that prominent Marxists texts by Soviet authors began to be translated into Turkish, leading to the wide dissemination of Marxist literature. Furthermore, during the 1950s, many people began to migrate from their villages to cities in western Turkey, and this process dramatically increased in the 1960s and 1970s when the Turkey's urban population exploded. This led not just to a rise in the industrial proletariat, but also a significant growth in the student population. It was this influx of students that played a major role in the rise of left-wing activism across the country. This was especially the case for Kurds – the rising number of Kurdish students attending western universities from the 1960s onwards played a significant part in generating discussion regarding their ethnicity. As Güneş writes, "the interaction among Kurdish students from various towns in Turkey increased the sense of comradeship among them leading to a greater awareness of their 'common' Kurdish identity and the growth of a national consciousness" (Güneş, 2012, p.50).

Following the 1971 military coup, a number of leading figures of the socialist movement were imprisoned, but this did not lead to the defeat of the socialist movement in Turkey. Instead, by the mid-1970s, left-wing activism was stronger than ever, and continued to gain momentum until this was brought to an abrupt end with the 1980 coup.

The 1980 coup was extraordinary oppressive, leading to the arrest of more than 500,000 citizens, and unlike the two coups that preceded it, effectively brought an end to the socialist movement in Turkey.

This chapter is divided into three parts. First, I look at the rise of the Türkiye İşçi Partisi (TIP: Turkish Worker's Party) and the emergence of Kurdish political activism within the party. While TIP only completed in two elections before the party was closed down following the 1971 military coup, the Kurdish activists inside the party succeeded in convincing the party to address the "Eastern question" and thus it was in this period that discourse surrounding the Kurds became more prevalent. Secondly, this chapter investigates the ideological cracks that started to emerge within the Turkish Left which also facilitated the emergence of the Kurdish movement, namely the establishment of the PKK. This part will analyse the discourses throughout the 1970, and notes how many of the cracks that emerged within the Turkish left during this period had reverberations today. Lastly, this chapter seeks to analyse the divisions within the Kurdish movement itself, specifically between the PKK and rival Kurdish organisations. Analysing these early fractures within the Kurdish political field helps us understand and contextualise HDP's later attempts to unite competing Kurdish political organisations.

Throughout this chapter, I seek to explore the relationship that underpinned the alliance between Kurdish activists and the Turkish left, before analysing the fissures and fractures that led to the separation of Turkish and Kurdish political activism. Despite the eventual irrevocable division between the two camps, I argue that these early Kurdish activists sought to frame their demands for Kurdish rights within the broader demand for democracy, and therefore the discourses articulated by Kurdish activists represented the

ideological foundations of Türkiyelileşme avant la lettre. As will be elaborated in greater detail in the following chapters, the emphasis on framing Kurdish rights within a broader demand for democracy is not unlike HDP's discourse today, and thus such an articulation of Kurdish demands during these two decades provides a platform that HDP and the Kurdish movement subsequently built on.

3.1 Türkiye İşçi Partisi and Kurdish activism

After the founding of TIP in 1961, the party went on to compete in two elections in the 1960s. In 1965, having gained 300,000 votes and 3% of the national vote, they won 15 seats in the Turkish assembly. In the 1969 elections, TIP's share of the national vote reduced to 2.65%, and as a result of changes to the electoral system which were created to undermine the influence of smaller parties, this meant TIP only managed to gain two seats in parliament (Lipovsky, 1992). A large proportion of their votes came from Istanbul, where middle-class 'progressives' likely voted for them. Furthermore, under Mehmet Ali Aybar's leadership, the party campaigned enthusiastically across Anatolia, and Aybar's emphasis on the need for land reform undoubtedly helped him secure strong support from Kurds and Alevis in Eastern Anatolia (Samım, 1981, pp.68-69).[3] The success of the 1965 election was no small feat for TIP, especially considering the pressure party members endured from the state. "As soon as it became known that a certain person had joined the TLP, it meant that he could be dismissed from his work on some minor pretext or other, or for no reason at all," Boran, a leading figure within TIP, wrote. "To be a TIP member meant to suffer ceaseless discrimination. Party meetings

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[3] Ahmet Samım was the pseudonym that political commenter Murat Belge used in the years following the oppressive 1980 military coup.

and the district and regional party centres were harassed and attacked" (Lipovsky, 1992, p. 13).

TIP was modelled on the British Labour Party, and they defined themselves in the socialist tradition, thus becoming the first parliamentary party in Turkey's history to define themselves on strictly ideological terms. However, unlike its predecessor, the pro-Soviet Turkish Communist Party (TKP), TIP weren't ideologically orthodox, but instead campaigned with vigour and openness to the point where its heterogeneous views gave it a populist bent. Mehmet Ali Aybar, who was a professor of law until he became party leader in the early-1960s, embodied the party's dynamic appeal. What makes the party remarkable is TIP managed to act as a sort of umbrella party that managed to absorb the various different ideologies that existed on the Turkish Left, and through their internal struggles sprung the dispersed factions of the contemporary left.

Due to its expansive style of leadership and views, Aybar welcomed a number of Kurdish activists to the party fold. After trade unions and intellectuals, the Kurds made up the third largest group in the party. Kurdish activists saw TIP as a potential ally, especially if they could raise their demands of the Kurdish people within the party. TIP's natural appeal to the Kurdish electorate may have been more directly a result of Aybar's campaigning across eastern Anatolia and his focus on land reform, but within the party there was an openness to engage with Kurdish voices. Musa Anter, a Kurdish activist, explained why Kurds made a conscious decision to work with Turkish socialists:

> Turkey's other political groups were fascists and shared a common hostility towards the Kurdish question. The Turanists and Kemalists were of the same opinion. At least they [socialists], genuine or not, were saying 'if we win in the

future we will grant your rights.' At least they recognised the existence of our rights that were seized from us (Anter, 1999, pp.210-11).

At the time, the debates surrounding the Kurdish question were centred on the underdevelopment in the Kurdish region. While Kurdish activism also addressed the Turkish state's claim that Kurds were of Turkish origin, they sought to address the economic inequality of the East which was known as mahrumiyet bölgesi ('region of deprivation'). This regional disparity, Kurdish intellectuals argued, questioned the existence of political equality between all citizens in Turkey. Such a discourse surrounding underdevelopment, and the refusal of authorities to listen to or tolerate such criticisms of the state, led many Kurdish activists to question the link between denial of Kurdish identity and the East's underdevelopment by claiming that the East was left underdeveloped to suppress Kurdish culture.

Such a discourse began in various magazines and journals from the 1950s onwards, but the founding of TIP allowed an opportunity for Kurds to vocalise their demands more publically within a political party. From their First Congress in 1964, TIP's party programme shows that the party would not shy away from addressing the underdevelopment and discrimination that Kurds faced:

> In the East and South-east 'region of deprivation', the public services are nearly non-existent ... Additionally those citizens who speak Kurdish or Arabic, or those who belong to the Alevi denomination are faced with discrimination... These citizens will also benefit from the rights and freedoms as recognised within the constitution (Lipovsky, 1992, p.40).

Such a statement was the first time that a political party in Turkey's history has defined the state's relationship with their Kurdish citizens as one based on discrimination and oppression. More importantly, such discourse was already drawing parallels between Kurds and other discriminated identities, in this case Alevis and Arabic-speakers. Such a

strategy draws parallel with the description of HDP's appeal to the "marginalised majority" as discussed in Chapter 2.

However, partly due to the growing confidence of Kurdish activists active in the party, TIP took on a more radical stance in the Second and Third Congress in that they sought to frame the debate beyond a simple issue of underdevelopment. This radicalisation towards supporting the Kurdish people's struggle for democratic and constitutional rights culminated in the Fourth Congress in 1970. In a significant resolution of the party, which incidentally was later used to ban the party following the 1971 military coup, TIP acknowledged the existence of a 'Kurdish nation' in Turkey's East and argued that a policy of repression, terror and assimilation has been pursued against the Kurdish people. The resolution defined the Kurdish problem not simply in terms of regional underdevelopment, but rather as an ethnic question whereby Kurdish demands for constitutional rights must be recognised (Vanly, 1971, pp.50-51). Furthermore, in parliament in 1970 Aybar raised questions over Turkey's policy of terror due to ongoing 'commando' military operations in the Kurdish regions:

> Since the creation of the republic, our compatriots of the east and southeast have never been treated as equal citizens. Speaking Kurdish, those compatriots are treated as third-class citizens and the present government is not the first one which has carried out such a policy against them. The policy of terror has always existed in the east and south-east, but the problems cannot be solved in this way. The policy of terror will lead us to a situation contrary to the hopes of those who are carrying out those measures (...). An end must be put to this policy, so that the compatriots of the east may feel attached to this country and to this nation's community (Vanly, 1971, p.49).

This shift in criticism within the Turkish socialist movement vis-à-vis the state's policy against Kurds was mainly due to Kurdish activists increasingly radical demands. For Kurds, the 1960s represented a period where activists began to tentatively articulate their

demands for further democratic rights for Kurdish citizens in the East. While it started

with clear demands to bring development to the south-east to bridge the clear economic

disparity, the discourse gradually began to take on a more ethnic dimension as Kurds

began to connect the lack of development and the denial of Kurdish identity. Doğan

Avcıoğlu, a founding member of the left-wing periodical Yön in the 1960s, having

defined the Kurdish issue as an ethnic one, questioned whether development itself was

the solution:

> Is it possible to solve a question with an ethnic dimension using economic
> measures alone? Numerous examples from around the world show us that those
> efforts which failed to recognize the ethnic dimension have failed' (Yeğen, 2016,
> p.163).

The transition of vocalizing Kurdish demands from a question of underdevelopment to

one with a distinct ethnic dimension led many activists to conclude that the Kurds

needed a separate organisation distinct from the Turkish Left, something which became

more pronounced after the ideological disputes that dominated TIP leading up to the

1971 military coup. This began during the so-called Doğu mitingleri ('Eastern

meetings'), where Kurdish activists within TIP held a series of meetings in the south-

east in 1967. While these meetings did not lead to immediate demands for a separate

Kurdish organisation, the fact that it took place in the south-east with a wide Kurdish

participation that was isolated from the mainstream Turkish socialist circles in the west

of Turkey showed the potential of organizing independently from the mainstream left.

The establishment of Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları (DDKO: Revolutionary

Eastern Cultural Berth) by Kurdish students in Ankara and Istanbul in 1969 was the first

distinctly separate Kurdish organisation. The transition away from a demand for

economic equality towards more overtly ethnic nationalistic demands continued to materialize. In this, DDKO represented a sudden break from the Turkish socialist movement which had struggled to articulate a coherent policy vis-à-vis the Kurds. Numerous Kurdish activists who were active in TIP, such as Kemal Burkay and Musa Anter, have written on their disillusionment with the Turkish socialist view that the Kurdish question would be solved within socialist conditions, and therefore they didn't want to focus on such particular regional demands of Kurds (Güneş, 2012, pp.66-68).

More importantly, the emergence of the 'Eastern Meetings' and DDKO marked a divergent discourse that continues to divide the Kurdish political field to this day. Crucially, such a division is marked by the very articulation of 'Kurdishness'. Türkiyelileşme attempts to embrace the political identity of Kurds at the expense of the ethnic identity, while nationalists argue such an articulation fails to draw attention to the distinctly ethnic dimension of the conflict and Kurdish identity in general. While TIP offered an opportunity to demand for Kurdish rights, it became increasingly clear that the framing of such a discourse was always going to be expressed through a pluralistic discussion on the need for equal rights for Kurds. Thus, much like HDP's framing of the need for peace for all the marginalised identities of Turkey, the discourse within TIP regarding Kurdish rights was distinctively universalist in character.

Thus, while the 1960s ended with a separation between Kurdish activists and the Turkish socialist movement, it is clear that the early engagement and cooperation between the two movements showed the potential for a united front against other political traditions in Turkey. While the establishment of DDKO in 1969 and the subsequent 1971 coup led to fractures between the two camps, the discussions and

collaboration that took place within TIP provided the platform with which HDP and the project of Türkiyelileşme tried to channel in later years.

3.2 Ideological cracks in the Turkish left and the birth of the Kurdish movement

This section focuses more thoroughly on the issue of 'self-determination' that dominated the discourse in the 1970s. Unlike the 1960s that was characterised by the cooperation of Kurdish activists with the Turkish Left in TIP, the fractures within TIP between those that advocated the right to self-determination and those that did not led to a more thorough separation between Turkish socialist and pro-Kurdish activism. Lastly, this section will conclude with an analysis of how such a separation led Kurdish activism to openly engage with more ethno-nationalist conceptions of political activism.

On 20th July 1971 TIP was closed down by the Supreme Court, with its resolution defending the Kurdish people's struggle used against them. However, the party had become embroiled for some time in ideological disputes. At first, following their success in the 1965 elections, Aybar defined the party as one of "non-capitalist way of development" whose goal was the replacement of the capitalist system with a socialist one which would be achieved by taking power through parliamentary means and laying the foundations of a socialist economy (Samım, 1981).[4] However, once the success of the election subsided, infighting began to appear as a new group called Milli Demokratik Devrim (National Democratic Revolution, or NDR) emerged. This group, led by Mihri Belli, believed that Turkey was in fact still semi-feudal and that the workers were too weak to achieve revolutionary change. It was necessary, they claimed, to work with a

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[4] For a deeper discussion on Aybar's ideas behind the "non-capitalist way of development" model within TIP, see Aybar, M. A., *Bağımsızlık, demokrasi, sosyalizm* (Istanbul, 1968), pp.514-17.

broad coalition of workers and progressive elements of the bourgeoisie, namely intellectuals and Kemalist officers. Furthermore, in their eyes, Turkey had yet to achieve full independence and was too dominated by the United States. Whereas, Aybar's group – the larger faction within TIP – believed that, having reached an advantaged stage of capitalism, Turkey was ripe for revolution which could be achieved through democratic means (Lipovsky, 1992).

From the mid-1960s onwards, cracks emerged within each faction. Within the "non-capitalist way of development" group, many became disgruntled with Aybar's leadership style, which was seen as too authoritarian. Furthermore, this faction, led by Behice Boran and Sadun Aren, were angered by Aybar's condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Likewise, within the MDD thesis, a split emerged when one group believed progressive forces within the state were a potential ally in fighting 'feudalism', while the other understood the struggle as between the oppressive state and its citizens (Zürcher, 2004, pp.255-56). This later group became more radicalized, led by the youth organisation Dev-Genç, and advocated armed struggle to bring forward revolutionary change.

Over time, it became clear that the Belli-led MDD group were indifferent to demands made by Kurdish activists. Belli himself interpreted the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925 as a reactionary uprising that only served British interests. As a sympathizer of Mustafa Kemal, he was wary of using the principle of self-determination for Kurdish goals. He argued that the Kurdish question would be solved within Turkey's borders through socialism, and that 'the principle of self-determination is not a must, and it does not follow from this principle that every nation, whatever the conditions, is obliged to

establish its own nation-state' (Yeğen, 2016, pp.164-65). Given than Belli believed in working with progressive military officers, it was clear that within the socialist movement, there remained a discourse that retained core elements of Kemalism. However, while such a Kemalist discourse limited the potential for cooperation with Kurdish activists, the youth-inspired radical wing did not share Belli's view that the Kurdish question would be solved strictly within Turkey's borders. A group of radicals including Mahir Çayan and Ertuğrul Kürkçü, who would later become important advocates of the 'frontists' tradition within the Turkish, wrote an open letter to Belli criticising his stance:

> This view is wrong and anti-socialist…. The revolutionary proletariat would consider the national question from the perspective of the principle of nations' rights to self-determination…. The revolutionary proletariat … would discuss openly which of the solutions presupposed by the principle of nations' rights to self-determination, such as separation, autonomy, federation, etc. would be feasible, when, and under what conditions (Çayan, 2015).

With the 1970s seeing an increasing influx of Marxist-Leninist literature being disseminated across socialist circles, much of the Kemalist nationalist discourse espoused by Belli was ditched in favour of more progressive Marxist language. However, Belli's perspective underlined that Kemalist discourse, with its inherent nationalism, still continued to influence sections of the Turkish left. This meant that certain schisms still existed within the socialist movement, which among other disputes, centred on the interpretation of the Kurdish question as a national question of self-determination or rather simply as a result of feudalism which could be solved through radical socialist reforms.

Those from within the MDD camp who emerged as defenders of the right of self-determination and criticised Belli's perspective became the radical frontist tradition, which emerged as a dominant force in Turkish leftist movements in the 1970s, and was born out of the youth-orientated Dev-Genç. They were not only critical of the TIP's tactic of trying to bring socialism through parliamentary means, but also its pro-Soviet leanings. These frontists were captivated by Guevarist ideas of urban warfare 'focoism' whereby a vanguard of paramilitary groups could inspire a general insurrection against the regime. Of the Turkish frontist tradition, the three most important groups were THKP, THKO and TKP/ML. THKP (Popular Liberation Party of Turkey) were led by Mahir Çayan, and attempted to imitate the Guevarist tradition of Latin American Revolutionaries. THKO (Popular Liberation Army of Turkey) were led by the charismatic Deniz Gezmiş, while TKP/ML (Communist Party of Turkey/ Marxist-Leninist) were led by Ibrahim Kaypakkaya and pursued a Maoist agenda.

In 1972, after the arrest of Deniz Gezmiş, these frontist revolutionaries kidnapped three NATO engineers (two British and one Canadian) in an attempt to negotiate the release of their revolutionary comrades who were facing execution. Led by Mahir Çayan and his THKP comrades, but also involving two senior members from Gezmiş' THKO organisation, they took the hostages to Kızıldere in the Black Sea region. Known as the 'Kızıldere incident', Special Forces raided the house on 30th March, killing the 10 revolutionaries and three hostages. The only survivor, Ertuğrul Kürkçü, would later become a prominent member and co-chair of HDP.

The importance of this incident is the effect it had on the young Abdullah Öcalan, who would later establish the PKK. Öcalan himself was arrested and imprisoned

for attending a demonstration in support of the Kızıldere revolutionaries, and subsequently spent 7 months in prison. The PKK leader and founder has cited the Kızıldere events as the beginning of his political awakening, stating that if it were not for such an incident "I could not have ventured on structuring a new theory... the emergence of myself [and the PKK] would have been impossible" (Özcan, 2006, p.90).

Öcalan was a known THKP sympathizer after his release from prison, and the ideological focus of the group in the mid-1970s reflected this. One of his early friends commented that 'until the end of 1975 it was not clear whether President Apo [a term PKK-sympathizers use for Öcalan] was leading a group of the Kurdish or Turkish Left' (Yüce, 1999, p.200). David McDowall points out that unlike all other Kurdish groups in Turkey, "the Apocular[5] were unlike all other Kurdish groups in Turkey in that they were drawn almost exclusively from Turkey's growing proletariat" (McDowall, 1996, p.418). Such confusion stems from the fact that, unlike the other Kurdish groups, the PKK's early formation all took place in Ankara in a student environment. This core group was initially a loose network of politicised students who were active in the student organisation Ankara Demokratik Yükesek Öğretim Derneği (ADYÖD; Ankara Democratic Higher Education Association), which was dominated by THKP-C sympathizers. This group around Öcalan was fluid, and involved frequent recruitment and long house meetings where the group developed and formed the basis of their ideology. In 1975, the group split from ADYÖD and settled on a new name, Kurdistan Devrimcileri (the Kurdistan Revolutionaries). They continued to work in Ankara until 1977, when they decided to move their operational base to the Kurdish south-east. From

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[5] *Apocular* means followers of Apo, a commonly used name for Öcalan. The core group that established the PKK in Ankara were originally known by this name.

1973-77, recruitment had taken place solely in Ankara, and had involved a mixture of Turks and Kurds. Of the core group of six Apocular that had been active since 1973, three were Kurds (Öcalan, Haydar Kaytan, and Cemil Bayık) and three were Turks (Kemal Pir, Haki Karer and Duran Kalkan) (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2011). The move to the south-east was because the group felt the Kurdish provinces was ideal conditions for a revolution, and for the Turks active in the group, they believed that 'the revolution of Turkey has to pass through Kurdistan.'[6]

Thus, the PKK's formation had much connection to the concurrent disputes that were emerging within the Turkish Left. The PKK were undoubtedly inspired by the frontist tradition of Turkey, who themselves had formed out of their opposition to remnants of Kemalist discourse with the MDD thesis. In contrast to other Kurdish political groups who, having become disillusioned with TIP and Turkey's socialist movement had begun to organize independently in the south-east, the PKK's emergence took place in Ankara through a clear cooperation between Turkish and Kurdish revolutionaries.

3.3 Division within Kurdish political organisations

Such a historical narrative helps us understand the roots of both traditions within the Kurdish political field. While the 1960s saw cooperation between Kurdish activists and Turkish socialists who believed change could be achieved through democratic means, the PKK stemmed from the more radical 'frontist' tradition which advocated an armed

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[6] This slogan, originally used by founding member of the organisation, Haki Karer, and later became a well-known slogan in pro-PKK publications.

uprising. Furthermore, for most Kurdish groups the 1960s was a period of cooperation with the Turkish socialist movement, before separating in the 1970s where more overtly nationalistic language became more pronounced. In contrast, for the PKK, the 1970s was a period when they were inspired and directly engaged with revolutionary leftist discourse that was prominent in Ankara in the 1970s. Here I examine how such distinctive trajectories between the PKK and rival Kurdish groups influenced the rivalry and discourse that emerged by the end of the 1970s.

As discussed above, the process of separation from the Turkish socialist movement for those that had been active in TIP became more pronounced after the 1970 coup. However, the cracks had already emerged by 1971, and this process of separation can be pinpointed to the establishment of DDKO in 1969 (which, like TIP, faced closure after the coup in 1971). Following the closure of DDKO, the 1970s saw the emergence of several Kurdish political groups. Türkiye Kurdistan Demokratik Partisi (TKDP: Turkey Kurdistan Democratic Party) was the only influential party at the beginning of the 1970s, but by the mid-1970s, after the party entered a period of crisis, left-wing offshoots such as Kawa, Rizgari and Ala Rizgari appeared. While TKDP were inspired by the Barzani-led Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Iraq, other parties were more sympathetic to Turkey's legal left and TIP in particularly. Kawa, Rizgari and Ala Rizgari all broke from TKDP to form more left-leaning parties closer to the tradition of TIP. Likewise, Türkiye Kürdistan Sosyalist Partisi (TKSP: Turkey Kurdistan Socialist Party) was led by Kemal Burkay, who as a prominent member of TIP, also took inspiration from the Turkish socialist movement. Lastly, there were a few other smaller

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revolutionary parties such as Tekoşin and Sterka Sor who – much like the PKK – from the illegal 'frontist' left tradition in Turkey.

Of all the different Kurdish organisations, Burkay's TKSP was the most important, which published an influential monthly magazine, Özgürlük Yolu (the Path of Freedom). True to Burkay's origins as a TIP member, TKSP rejected armed struggle and believed in working through nonviolent means. In Burkay's own words, his party took a firm stance against armed struggle: "Our party's view was very definite on this [armed struggle]. Kurds have staged rebellions many times and never succeeded, so we believed that Kurdish society first needed a political organisation before starting a rebellion" (Marcus, 2007, p.31).

The view that prioritised affecting change through democratic means over a revolutionary armed struggle led to the election of two Kurdish candidates Edip Solmaz and Mehdi Zana who ran on an independent ticket in the 1977 municipal elections in Batman and Diyarbakir respectively. Mehdi Zana was a prominent member within TKSP, and along with Solmaz, were the first politicians to win an election in Turkey on an overtly pro-Kurdish ticket. With many Kurdish nationalist and Turkish socialist parties banned from competing in elections by the Yuksek Secim Komisyon (YSK: High Election Commission), the national parties in the 1970s showed an inability to advance the concerns of Kurdish activists. As a result, much like HADEP's experience in the late 1990s, Kurdish electoral activism sought to bypass this by competing in local politics. However, such success was short-lived. Edip Solmaz was killed in an extra-judicial murder in 1979, while Mehdi Zana was arrested in 1980 following the military coup and remained in Diyarbakir prison until 1991.

However, Zana's campaign had been unapologetically pro-Kurdish, with his election manifesto promising to 'support the struggle of our people against imperialism, fascism, colonialism, and feudal reactionaries' and 'expose the deceitful tricks being played on our labour, our culture, our homeland; in short, on our existence' (Watts, 2010, pp.46-47). Such a perspective was in line with the increased radicalisation that tended to see the Kurdish struggle as an anti-colonial struggle against Turkey. Therefore, Zana's manifesto which highlighting and connected Kurdish 'existence' with concepts of 'homeland' was symbolic of the radicalisation that emerged after these Kurdish groups separated themselves from the Turkish socialist movement. Furthermore, while Zana's 2-year tenure as mayor was embroiled with issues surrounding a lack of funds and a lack of support from any national party, he argued that municipal government offices could become "castles" for Kurdish advocacy and thus successfully showed the potential with which Kurdish activists could use electoral office to mobilize support for the Kurdish cause.

One of the problems the PKK faced during these years was a lack of legitimacy compared to their rival Kurdish organisations. All the other parties had evolved out of earlier organisations, such as TIP or DDKO. Öcalan himself came out of nowhere and did not hail from a prominent family. In the eyes of rival Kurdish groups, the PKK were essentially a group of university dropouts demanding an armed struggle in the Kurdish regions. Furthermore, the PKK made further enemies by their aggressive tactics against rival groups, going as far as murdering other activists in an attempt to gain a foothold within Kurdish society. As Aliza Marcus writes,

Öcalan saved his greatest criticism for those he saw as rivals. The other Turkish Kurdish groups – Kawa, Özgürlük Yolu, DDKD, and the reformed TKDP – were rejected as "collaborators" and "revisionists." Their demands for an independent Kurdish state were dismissed as false fronts, their promises of armed struggle were called fantasies... He made it clear that these groups were a disgrace to the Kurdish national movement, their leaders in essence traitors... (Marcus, 2007, p.34).

However, despite their unpopularity amongst the more seasoned Kurdish activists in Turkey, the PKK success largely rests on the decision to pull out of Turkey months before the 1980 coup took place. All the other rival groups were closed down and its activists forced to flee the country or face arrest, and as a result the PKK's escape to Syria allowed them to reorganise and regroup in preparation for the commencement of their armed struggle in 1984.

Therefore, it became clear that by the end of the 1970s, the Kurdish political groups were extremely fragmented. At the same time, due to the proliferation of separate Kurdish organisations, the discourse began to take a more radical stance, highlighting the Turkish state's 'colonisation' of Kurdistan and the need for a 'national liberation.' This was a far cry from the tentative demands made by Kurdish activists working within the Turkish socialist movement. Thus, it became clear that the separation between the Kurdish and Turkish left that defined the 1970s led to increasingly radical demands, and the discourse became defined more thoroughly within the framework of anti-colonialism. Furthermore, rather than focus on a universalist, civic understanding of the conflict, these Kurdish groups mobilised a more thorough ethnicised understanding of the relationship between Kurds and Turks. The one exception in this period was the PKK, whose spirit of revolutionary cooperation between Turkey and Kurdistan is captured in their slogan, "the revolution of Turkey has to pass through Kurdistan."

Understanding the different political origins of the PKK and other Kurdish groups – with most Kurdish groups stemming from the mainstream Turkish socialist movement within TIP while the PKK's tradition stems from the revolutionary Çayan tradition – is essential in understanding the vortex of internal struggles that surround the Kurdish movement today. While HDP has attempted to recruit from disparate Kurdish political traditions, many have shown an unwillingness to join a party that they say is too close to the PKK. Such hesitation stems from the same hesitation that many Turkish socialists reserved for the militant, revolutionary wing of the Turkish left in the early 1970s, and in many ways we can trace the split in the Kurdish movement through the same lens with which the cracks emerged within the Turkish left.

However, as subsequent chapters will show, HDP's Türkiyelileşme project attempts to channel the cooperation that marked the 1960s under the banner of TIP. Rejecting the nationalist language of Kurdish political groups that infused the discourse in the 1970s, the tradition of pro-Kurdish political parties since the 1990s has always emphasised and framed Kurdish particularist concerns within a broad democratic framework. Thus, essentialist or emotional language of nationalism was broadly shunned in favour of a more universalist framework which sought to challenge the Turkish state's discourse on Kurdish rights. The foundation of such a framework can be traced back to the discourse that emerged in TIP during the 1960s.

CHAPTER 4

PRO-KURDISH PARTIES ENTER PARLIAMENT 1990-2012

While the last chapter focused on explaining the rise of Kurdish nationalism and

activism throughout the 1960s and 1970s, this chapter seeks to analyse the emergence of

Kurdish political parties in Ankara during the 1990s and early 2000s. Whereas the last

chapter focused on tracing the shared lineage between the Kurdish and Turkish socialist

movement, this chapter will observe how pro-Kurdish parties became more

institutionally ingrained into Turkey's political landscape. Much like the early

cooperation of Kurds within TIP in the 1960s before the fracturing and separation of

Kurdish movements in the 1970s, this period highlights similar fractures and fissures.

However, I argue that it is in this period that we begin to see Türkiyelileşme avant la

lettre through the institutionalization of legal pro-Kurdish party activism. Moreover,

while the pre-1980 period was marked by disparate demands by rival Kurdish

organisations, it is in this period that the framing of Kurdish rights becomes set within a

universalist, democratic discourse. Thus, the blueprint of HDP's strategy of

Türkiyelileşme can be observed through the discourse used by the early pro-Kurdish

parties in the 1990s.

Throughout the chapter, I attempt to draw upon the experiences of the four pro-

Kurdish parties: the Halkın Emek Partisi (HEP, the People's Labour Party) from 1990-

93; the Demokrasi Partisi (DEP, the Democracy Party) from 1993-94; the Halkın

Demokrasi Partisi (HADEP, the People's Democratic Party) from 1994-2003; the

Demokratik Halk Partisi (DEHAP, the Democratic People's Party) from 1997-2005; the Demokratik Toplum Partisi (DTP, the Democratic Society Party) from 2005-09; and lastly, the Barış ve Demokrası Partisi (BDP, the Peace and Democratic Party) from 2008-14. During this period from 1990-2012, Kurdish demands of the six pro-Kurdish legal parties were vocalized in parliament and as a result, Kurds began to get significantly more exposure within Turkish media. Broadly, these pro-Kurdish parties attempted to challenge the unequal political inequality that Kurds face in Turkey, and thus framed the Kurdish issue as an issue of rights. In this, the parties focus on the need for greater equality across the different ethnic identities was articulated primarily through seeking Kurdish rights as part of a broader democratic demand. However, as we shall see, many of the parties were banned by the Supreme Court under an array of accusations that tended to centre on charges of separatism or terrorism.

The first part of this chapter will focus on the early Kurdish political parties – HEP and DEP– from 1990-94, and will analyse the challenges Kurdish politicians faced during this period. As we shall see, the lack of legitimacy in the eyes of the Turkish bureaucracy meant that these parties were swiftly closed down, often soon after their formation, meaning that the major debates of Kurdish politicians at the time questioned the virtue of pursuing an agenda in Ankara's parliament. Regarding the question of Türkiyelileşme, HEP's founding principles were broadly in line with such a concept as the party focused on a universalist vision, centring around concepts of improved democracy and human rights whilst avoiding mentioning red-flag words such as 'Kurdistan'. I argue that the founding principles provided the ideological footprint for later pro-Kurdish parties such as HDP. However, despite attempts by HEP to portray

themselves as a 'party of Turkey', both HEP and DEP failed to succeed in such integration or legitimacy.

This will be followed by a second section that focuses on the Kurdish political activism of HEDAP and DEHAP in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. Both parties failed to gain representation in parliament, and as a result, Kurdish party politics drifted away from Ankara and shifted towards the Kurdish-majority south-east. As we shall see, the relative longevity of both these parties when compared to HEP and DEP allowed them to institutionalise themselves in the south-east and gain legitimacy through their control of various municipalities across the south-east.

The last section of this chapter examines the experience of DTP and BDP from 2005-2012. It was during this period that the ideological grounding of these pro-Kurdish parties became more intertwined with the PKK. This was partly due to the ideological transformation introduced by Abdullah Öcalan who proposed a more democratically-infused ideology known as 'democratic autonomy'. Such an ideology is elaborated further in Chapter 6, but it certainly muddied the field for pro-Kurdish legal activism as the goals of the two become more entangled with each other. Moreover, due to the liberalisation of the AKP and peace process, this period allowed for a more thoroughly cohesive set of demands on the part of the Kurdish movement.

Throughout this chapter, I give a broad overview of the pro-Kurdish political organisations which forms the backbone for understanding the context of the establishment in HDP in 2012. I do this through an examination of the experience of these pro-Kurdish parties, both with regard to state policies against the party as well as

from the perspective of the Kurdish politicians themselves. This will focus on an analysis of state coercion, which tended to accuse the parties of not being a 'party of Turkey', but instead being a regional party focused entirely on Kurdish rights. These accusations often led to the Supreme Court closing down the parties. The charges levelled against them rested on them being too Kurdish, and since the vast majority of parliamentarians were of Kurdish origin, the parties often struggled to respond. In many ways, although their discourse broadly followed a Türkiyelileşme agenda, the public perception continued to view the parties as regionalist, with the implication being that they were 'separatist' organisations. Thus, while Türkiyelileşme avant la lettre formed party policy, the failure of these parties rests on their inability to successfully articulate Türkiyelileşme to the Turkish public in order to bypass 'treasonous' accusations . Moreover, through analysing party speeches and manifestos, I analyse how Kurdish rights was framed by pro-Kurdish politicians. Much in the vein of Kurdish experience within TIP, I show how Kurdish activists continued to argue in favour of Kurdish rights using universalist concepts such as human rights and democracy. While Chapter 6 will include a more detailed analysis of the similarities between HEP and HDP – and thus my argument that HEP provided the ideological blueprint for HDP – this chapter focuses more on how Kurdish activists have responded to state coercion.

Before beginning with the birth of HEP in 1990, it is important to mention the physical and psychological effect of the 1980 military coup. Not only did it put an end to the inroads that Kurdish activists like Mehdi Zana had achieved through municipal elections, it also decimated the Turkish Left, with more than 50,000 activists arrested. The crackdown did not only affect Turkish socialists, as Kurdish activists were also

severely repressed, and thus they were unable to grow throughout the 1980s. Throughout

this decade, Kurdish voters generally voted for the Motherland Party (AP: Anavatan

Partisi) or the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP: Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti).

However, while it took a full decade after the military coup for a decidedly pro-Kurdish

party to appear, the severity of the coup and the rise of the PKK as an armed force

launching attacks against the Turkish state fundamental changed the playing field for

Kurdish activists seeking office. For Kurds, the Turkish state constituted a significantly

different kind of regime before and after the 1980 coup. As Watts argues, 'in the 1960s

and 1970s the state behaved more like an absentee landlord in the southeast than the

watchdog of overlord state that developed after 1980s' (Watts, 2010, p.50). Furthermore,

with the dominance of the PKK in the 1990s, compared to the numerous Kurdish

organisations that competed with each other in the 1970s, the Turkish state became

increasingly wary of pro-Kurdish parties in the 1990s which limited the flexibility of

Kurdish politicians.

4.1 Kurds in parliament – the experience of HEP an DEP 1990-94

The formation of the HEP came about through participation and dialogue with the

Turkish left, where a number of Kurdish politicians that eventually established HEP had

originally been parliamentarians in the centre-left SHP. While the presence of Kurdish

politicians within the party had helped the SHP gain a foothold amongst Kurdish voters

in the south-east, such an experience was short-lived when seven Kurdish MPs were

expelled from the party after attending an international conference in Paris on the

Kurdish question in Turkey (Demir, 2005, 61). Prior to the conference, the SHP had

explicitly banned their members from attending for fear of raising suspicions, but the Kurdish parliamentarians decided to attend nonetheless. Upon their return, they were expelled, which led to a number of resignations from the party from Kurdish MPs as well as dozens of regional SHP administrators of Kurdish origins and about three thousand rank-and-file members (Barkey, 1998).

However, before the expulsions, there had been a number of tensions between pro-Kurdish advocates and the more Kemalist wing of the party. The SHP was founded in 1985 by the liberal intellectual Erdal İnönü, and as the only influential left-leaning party, it housed an assortment of liberals, Kemalists, Kurds and Turkish leftists. Much like TIP in the 1960s, many Kurds saw an opportunity within the party to air their grievances and there were various Turkish liberals who were sympathetic to them. However, such opportunities were rarely taken as the party leadership were fearful of angering more conservative wings of the party. Aydın Güven Gürkan, a founding member and parliamentarian of SHP, remembered the dynamic as:

> Even when we mentioned that there were some Kurdish members of our party who didn't speak or read Turkish, and suggested that we might translate our party statements into Kurdish so all could understand, this scared them, and the deputy who suggested it was disciplined... In another incident, a deputy who mentioned the Kurdish people as a distinct ethnic group was not allowed to talk further and his statement was taken out of the minutes (Watts, 2010, p.61).

Following the party expulsions, a new initiative called the Yeni Demoratik Oluşum (the New Democratic Formation) was established by 16 former SHP MPs in December 1989. While this was led by Kurdish MPs, the group had a number of high-profile Turkish socialists within it and they stressed the need to develop 'a new left-wing movement that would campaign for freedom, pluralism, participation and democracy' (Güneş, 2012,

156). However, following the New Democratic Formation's first public assembly in March 1990, a number of prominent Turkish socialists – who had previously been involved with SDP – left the organisation. One such figure was Murat Belge, a left-wing intellectual, who said that he and others left because while 'the Kurdish problem was the spark that set it going, a Kurdish party wasn't what we had in mind' (Watts 2010, 63). Gürkan, who described SDP's decision to expel Kurdish members as the biggest mistake the party ever made, said that while the Kurds themselves didn't want an ethnic Kurdish party, the fact that the Turkish press labelled the New Democratic Formation as a Kurdish movement meant it was inescapably Kurdish and therefore unable to be a party for other identities.

A few months later, in June 1990, the HEP was formed. However, the resignations from Turkish socialists such as Murat Belge and Aydın Güven Gürkan made the new party more Kurdish in character than they intended. In many ways, the formation of HEP was the result of a series of struggles between the Kurdish nationalist mobilization and the institutionalized Turkish centre-left. However, unlike the HDP of Turkey today, the political climate at the time did not allow for a deep alliance to solidify between the Turkish left and Kurdish advocates. It is nonetheless an early example of cooperation between the two political groups, and as such reflects the Kurdish politicians' aim of attracting progressive figures from the Turkish left through campaigning on progressive and universalist notions of democracy and freedom.

Such a formation of HEP goes some way to explaining HEP's manifesto that was published in 1990. In contrast to Mehdi Zana's unapologetically pro-Kurdish manifesto of 1977, HEP's manifesto was a much more carefully worded document focused on the

promotion of democracy, freedom and human rights. While this can be partly explained

by the need to circumvent the 1982 constitution that strictly banned any mention of the

existence of the Kurds or any party that explicitly voiced Kurdish demands, it also

reflects the origins of the party as a component of the Turkish left. In their opening

program, the party tried to advertise themselves as a party that represents broad swathes

of Turkish society:

> the workers, the unemployed, the rural people, the civil servants, the teachers, democrats, the intellectuals of social democratic and socialist persuasion, the small businesses and artisans, the masses who have been subjected to oppression and exploitation and above all everyone who supports democracy (HEP, 1990, p.10).

Thus, while attempts to incorporate different political subjectivities and appeal to a large

array of different identities is more commonly associated with HDP, HEP clearly

articulated a similar political strategy. Moreover, the language used by HEP is strikingly

similar to that used by Demirtaş more than 25 years later. In the 2018 Presidential

elections, Demirtaş made a campaign speech from prison via a telephone call with his

wife. In the speech, which was recorded into a video, the incarcerated leader used a

similar language to describe himself as a representative of a broad range of political

subjects:

> I am trapped inside four walls, but I know that there are thousands of Demirtaş' right now, working in the fields. Demirtaş is now working at the mines, at the workshops. He is at the lecture halls, at the squares, at the rallies. He is at the construction site; Demirtaş is at a strike, at the resistance. He has just been fired. Demirtaş is unemployed and poor. He is young, he is a woman, and he is a child. He is Turkish, he is Kurdish, and he is Circassian. He is Pomac, he is Bosnian. He is Alevi. He is Sunni. No matter what he is, he is hopeful and vigorous. Demirtaş is at the "halay", he is at the "govend", he is at "horon" (YouTube, 2018).

In many ways, such an inclusive approach on the part of HEP was a result of having a foothold in both the mainstream party system and the Kurdish movement, which created a strange dualism which the party's members tried to balance. With the PKK continuing their armed attacks on security forces in the volatile south-east, HEP were keen to distance themselves from the violence associated with the militant organisation. 'We are a party of the masses,' HEP Chairman Fehmi Işıklar said soon after the party opened. 'Our right line extends to 'democrat' but our left line stops before armed action. We are inviting the people between those two lines to join us' (Watts 2010, 64). Here we see concrete effort being made by the party leadership to distinguish themselves from the Kurdish militants, and situate themselves within the mainstream party system as a party for all of Turkey, rather than just a Kurdish party representing Kurds.

However, such 'inclusivity' of the party was challenged by the mainstream Turkish press continuously since the party was founded. Mahmut Alınak, a HEP deputy for Şirnak, explained, "HEP's mission wasn't to solve the Kurdish problem. It was to fight against the violation of human rights and to fight for democracy. We identified the Kurdish problem as a top priority, of course. But we were very determined to solve the problems of democracy, not just Kurdish problems... But the HEP was always attacked. It was forced in some ways to become more and more Kurdish." (Watts, 2010, 64) Within months of being formed, Fehmi Işıklar conceded in 1991 that the HEP was primarily a Kurdish party,

> We are the party of the most oppressed, exploited and those who are under the most pressure. Despite all our statements, those who describe the People's Labour Party [HEP] as a 'Kurdish party' admit a truth, that in this country the Kurds are the most oppressed, exploited and suppressed people. If the HEP is

trusted by the most oppressed then we will be honoured to be also the party of the Kurds (Demir, 2005, p.117).

Despite the acrimonious expulsions of Kurdish MPs the year previously, HEP continued to work with the centre-left SHP. In the October 1991, HEP MPs contested the election on the SHP ticket. This was partly due to election regulation – as a newly formed party, they didn't fulfil the election law technicalities. While they had the option of running as independents, the electoral system meant they had better chances of winning as candidates for an official party. SHP Party Chairman announced that the agreement was "not merely an election alliance but a step towards reintegration... the "artificial differences" between HEP and SHP were now being removed" (Watts, 2010, 66). SHP won 20.8% of the national vote, with 22 of their 88 MPs coming from HEP candidates running in the south-east.

However, the alliance between the two parties quickly came under pressure. During the parliamentary oath, which proclaims to protect the unity of the 'Turkish nation', the newly-elected Leyla Zana (the wife of former Diyarbakır mayor, Mehdi Zana) added a Kurdish sentence at the end of the oath 'for the brotherhood of the Turkish and Kurdish people' (Demir, 2005, 134). Such an event caused uproar among mainstream political parties, with many seeing it as a provocation that challenged article two of the constitution that reads "the state of Turkey is an indivisible entity. Its language is Turkish" (1982 Constitution). As a result, the Kurdish MPs were accused of supporting separatism and the PKK since Zana's statement in parliament openly acknowledged the existence of Kurds in Turkey. Mehmet Emin Sever, one of the Kurdish MPs who successfully contested the 1991 election on the HEP-SHP ticket, remembered how "some people in the parliament wouldn't even look at us, we couldn't

talk. They would point their fingers at us and say we were protecting the PKK. We were irrelevant" (Marcus, 2007, p.207).

Such pressure that was being placed on HEP wasn't helped by the fact that during HEP's Extraordinary Congress in December 1991, Esma Öcalan, the mother of the PKK leader, was greeted with affection as an honoured guest by many HEP members, including some MPs. Within a month, both Leyla Zana and Hatip Dicle – another Kurdish MP who had caused controversy during the parliamentary oath – were forced to resign on 16 January 1992. While the remaining 20 Kurdish MPs remained within SHP, relations soon deteriorated after the government – of which SHP was a junior coalition partner in - extended emergency rule in the south-east in February 1992. Following the Newruz Kurdish New Year's protests in March 1991, in which Turkish security forces shot and killed as many as 90 demonstrators in the south-east, the remaining Kurdish MPs quit the SHP and re-joined the HEP.

While the Supreme Court began a process to close down HEP for 'engaging in activities to weaken Turkey's territorial and national unity' (Güneş, 2012, 161) – a case was filed to the Constitutional Court in July 1992 and the party were closed down a year later – the closure of the party did not end pro-Kurdish party activism. Instead, Kurdish activists formed new parties to take HEP's place. Furthermore, as Watts argues, subsequent parties broadly based their politics on the ideological footprint of HEP,

> Surveying these parties over time highlights the degree to which HEP and its first generation of leadership established an institutional footprint with particular characteristics that survived HEP's demise. Although it would be a mistake to say the parties were identical to one another, for the most part the pro-Kurdish parties did not split or substantially revise their agendas, and they exhibited many of the same characteristics established by HEP (Watts, 2010, p.69).

The legal proceeding being prepared against HEP from 1992 also coincided with a more radicalised stance being adopted by its members. During the party's Second Congress in September 1992 – which took place 2 months after legal proceedings to close the party had formally begun – many important figures in the party had argued that the PKK's engagement in the political process was needed (Demir, 73-82). Likewise, Mahmut Alınak, an MP for Şirnak, had proposed the possibility of establishing regional parliaments as a step towards satisfying Kurdish demands (Güneş, 2012, 161). While such a proposal was relatively new for Kurdish party activism, it has since become a focal point of discussion within pro-Kurdish activism. It also shows the growing discontent with the political process taking place in Ankara, and the fact that such a proposal was suggested shows HEP's gradual geographical shift to the Kurdish-majority south-east. Watts argues that such a regional shift within the party began after the 1991 election when a younger generation of deputies with closer ties to the southeast entered parliament:

> [The SHP-HEP 1991 election list] also brought a new generation of younger, regionally based HEP deputies to the parliament, some of whom were more closely aligned with the PKK... The new parliamentarians reflected HEP's social grounding in Kurdish regional politics of the southeast much more than the party's establishment origins. Many of the new deputies had grown up in the late 1970s and early 1980s in an environment shaped by increasingly active Kurdish organisations and the 1980 military coup and its aftermath, and they did not have the same personal and institutional links to the Turkish left as did HEP's first generation of leadership. All the new parliamentarians were born in the Kurdish regions of the southeast, and many had Kurdish activist connections (Watts, 2010, p.67).

In May 1993, three months prior to the closing of HEP, Demokrasi Partisi (DEP: Democracy Party) was established. Many of the MPs who were in HEP joined DEP before the party was shut down so they could retain their seats in parliament. However,

the context of DEP's establishment coincided with an increasingly more radical stance being taken by a number of Kurdish politicians, which was cemented by the election of known PKK-sympathizer Hatip Dicle to the DEP party chair (Güney & Başkan, 2008, p. 27). Following the Second Congress of HEP in September 1992, Kurdish parliamentarians had gradually resorted to using unconventional methods to raise awareness to their demands. In November 1992, several HEP MPs started a hunger strike to protest the political murder of some of their members as well as the non-functionality of parliament in recognising the Kurdish demands. In April 1993, Ahmet Türk had led a delegation to the PKK headquarters in Lebanon to request an extension of the PKK ceasefire (Güneş, 2012, 163), which was later used by the government to argue that the party was a political front for the Kurdish militants.

But by the time, DEP was established in May 1993, the political atmosphere had changed dramatically. The Turkish President Turgut Özal had been steadily making plans for peace with the Kurdish militants, and having successfully pushed to end ban on written and spoken Kurdish in 1991, there was good reason to believe he was serious about reform. He had been meeting regularly with Iraqi Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani who maintained cordial relations with both the Turkish President and the PKK leader, and with the PKK announcing a ceasefire in March 1993, there was genuine hope for lasting peace. However, Özal's sudden death in April 1993 put an end to such hopes, and when executive decision making shifted to Süleyman Demirel, who did not have Özal's restraining influence on the military, a new hawkish government strategy was set into motion. In May, PKK rebels killed 33 unarmed soldiers which effectively ended any

last hopes of peace. By the summer, the new Prime Minister, Tansu Çiller, announced a new "all-out war" against the PKK (Marcus, 2007, pp.211-15).

These wider developments had a direct impact on Kurdish deputies in parliament, who had been actively calling for peace. The new military approach by the government meant political suppression against DEP was more easily justified, with political murders against party members becoming increasingly numerous. Such attacks had begun as far back as July 1991 when Vedat Aydın, HEP's leader in Diyarbakir province at the time, was murdered by unknown assailants. However, by 1993, such murders were increasing. In September 1993, when DEP deputies were leading a fact-finding mission in Batman that was investigating such political murders, the team came under armed attack leading to the death of Mardin MP Mehmet Sincar, with a number of other MPs injured in the attack. According to Osman Ölmez, more than 50 members of HEP and DEP were murdered between 1991 and 1994 (Ölmez, 1995, p.465).

Attacks against party members weren't the only pressure the party was facing. In the lead up to the local elections scheduled for 27th March 1994, there was a lot of internal debate surrounding whether DEP should participate. The PKK themselves were calling for an absolute boycott of the elections (Watts, 2010, p.107), and the political pressures against the party led many party activists to reach the same conclusion. On 18th February 1994, the DEP headquarters in Ankara was bombed, killing one person and injuring twenty more. One newspaper report noted that the building 'looked like a field of war, as if it had been bombed from the air' (Diyarbakır Söz, February 19, 1994). This was preceded by six bombings of DEP offices across the country since January, most of which happened in the southeast. During the first two months of 1994, DEP had

been subject of severe persecution with security forces detaining at least 140 DEP administrators and active members. On February 24th, as DEP figures met in Ankara to decide whether to participate in the March 1994 elections, two sons of the DEP mayor of Bağlar (a sub district of Diyarbakır) were shot dead (Watts, 2010, pp.107-109). On February 27th, DEP formally announced their decision to withdraw from the March municipal elections.

While DEP's withdrawal from the election meant that there would be no pro-Kurdish party representation in local office until 1999, the government was also making coercive efforts to remove Kurdish deputies from Parliament. On March 2nd 1994, the parliament lifted the legal immunity of DEP MPs, with six DEP MPs arrested on 17th March and two more in July. During the trial of the eight deputies on 8th August, six were sentenced to prison and two released. After appealing to the Yargıtay (Supreme Court of Appeals), the number was reduced to four MPs (Orhan Doğan, Leyla Zana, Ahmet Türk and Selim Sadak) each receiving a 15 year jail sentence (Güneş, 2012, pp.163-64). The remaining DEP deputies did not fare much better – after the Constitutional Court banned the DEP in June 1994, six of the remaining thirteen pro-Kurdish MPs fled to Europe in order to avoid arrest (Watts, 2010, p.112).

Within less than 18 months, the government had shifted from considering a genuine peace process with the PKK under Turgut Özal's initiative to a new hawkish government policy that sought to destroy all forms of pro-Kurdish political representation at the municipal and Parliament level. In many ways, this was achieved by the coordinated effort between the Turkish parliament, military and judiciary. Due to such coercion by the state, there was a long gap where Kurds suffered from a lack of

political representation within parliament. While local representation returned in the 1999 local elections when HADEP successfully contested and won a series of municipalities, pro-Kurdish parties had to wait until 2007 for pro-Kurdish deputies to return to parliament.

The experiences of HEP and DEP in parliament from 1990-94 are crucially important in understanding the dynamics of pro-Kurdish party politics in Turkey's history. During those years, Kurdish deputies had first worked alongside the Turkish left in the form of SDP, but due to accusations of solely being a Kurdish party, the deputies struck out on their own. This wasn't unlike the experience of Kurdish activism in the 1970s, where Kurdish activists lost faith with the Turkish socialist movement in the 1970s and worked alone. Much like the racialization that took place as a result, the inclusive language of HEP was ditched in favour of a more radical stance used by DEP. Watts argues that DEP's radicalisation led to the party being more closely linked with transnational Kurdish nationalist circles: 'The ascendance within the party of pro-PKK factions became evident when the DEP party congress elected outspoken Diyarbakir parliamentarian Hatip Dicle as party chair. Dicle sought to publicly align the party with the PKK and used the party to advocate on its behalf' (Watts, 2010, p.69). The fact that DEP's time in parliament took place in the context of the breakdown of any lingering hopes of peace following Özal's death and the increased persecution of DEP members only marginalised the party further. When the party decided to withdraw from the upcoming elections in February 1994, the party was deeply divided between those that advocated re-establishing closer relations with the Turkish liberal establishment and those that sought to tie themselves closer to the PKK.

Looking back on such a period, it becomes apparent that the coercion and persecution by the state on both parties led to the perpetuation of the pro-Kurdish parties' status as marginal challengers. By the time DEP were closed in 1994, the pro-Kurdish party had been successfully portrayed as a political front of the PKK, and on these grounds the party's closure and deputies incarceration was seen as justified. However, during HEP's formation – which had one foot in the door of mainstream politics through their association with the centre-left SDP – the language used was entirely different. Thus, the moderation or radicalisation of pro-Kurdish party parties depended on whether they managed to work alongside the Turkish liberal or socialist political life.

However, as the state's persecution against the parties became more forceful and coordinated in nature, the pro-Kurdish parties were marginalised which prevented the party becoming institutionalised into Turkey's party system, and thereby encouraged a process of radicalisation. Therefore, due to the polarised political discourse and persecution of the state that forced HEP and DEP into a marginal status, cooperation between the Turkish left and Kurdish activists proved impossible. Much of this failure was due to volatile nature of Turkey's war with the PKK, and by 2012, HDP benefited from the security of the peace process and the liberalisation that dominated that political period. However, despite such difficulties, HEP's ideological blueprint that focused more thoroughly on inclusive cooperation and democracy, contrasted sharply with the more overtly nationalist discourse that dominated Kurdish activism in the late 1970s, exemplified by undeniably pro-Kurdish ticket that Mehdi Zana stood on in the 1977

municipal election in Diyarbakir. It was such an ideological blueprint on the part of HEP which marks the beginning of a Türkiyelileşme avant la lettre.

4.2 Regionalization of party activism: HADEP's rejection of the centre

Following the closure of DEP and the incarceration of the pro-Kurdish deputies, Kurdish party activists set about rebuilding the movement. Due to the 10% threshold restricting party representation, neither HADEP (established 1994) and DEHAP (established 1997) managed to gain a seat in parliament. In the three general elections of 1995, 1999 and 2002, HADEP contested the elections winning 4.17%, 4.76% and 6.12% respectively. The failure to cross the 10% threshold in these elections was a major reason behind the decision of the pro-Kurdish Demokratik Toplum Partisi (DTP: Democratic Society Party) to contest the 2007 elections as independent candidates, in which 22 pro-Kurdish deputies entered parliament for the first time since 1994.

During the years in the wilderness outside of party representation, the pro-Kurdish parties managed to reorientate themselves to building a more localised, grassroots movement. Due to DEP's decision to boycott the 1994 local elections, there had yet to be pro-Kurdish representation throughout HEP and DEP's existence. While some municipalities had pro-Kurdish mayors after the 1989 local elections under the SHP banner, the fact that the Kurds did not have their own party during this period meant such municipalities were limited in building strong local organisation.

However, in 1999, HADEP successfully contested the local elections, and for the first time, Kurdish representation was secured on a local level by winning control of 37

towns and cities across the Kurdish region. Such a result represented a major breakthrough in terms of using municipal representation to cement pro-Kurdish activism as a local, institutionalised force during this period. HADEP had the strongest support in Diyarbakir, Batman and Hakkari, winning 62.5%, 57.2%, 56.1% respectively. Taking the majority of votes for the first time in these three cities, pro-Kurdish parties began to mobilize the state's resources to achieve what Mehdi Zana had described as cities like Diyarbakır as 'castles' for the Kurdish movement:

> "HEP and DEP believed the Kurdish problem could only be solved in Ankara, and their energies were directed towards this throughout their period in parliament. It was only after the marginalisation of such parties from parliament that Kurdish party activists started directing their energies towards local elections to cement their support base amongst Kurds in the south-east" (Kurdish journalist, personal interview, 2019).

HADEP's election victory in the south-east was not necessarily repeated across the country, gaining less than 5% of the national vote. In fact, the party performed strongest in areas where ethnic Kurds made up the vast majority of the population in the south-east. Despite the huge influx of Kurdish migrants to western cities such as Istanbul and Izmir in the late 1990s, HADEP's vote only marginally increased between the 1995 and 1999 election. In Istanbul, HADEP's share of the vote only increased from 3.6% to 4% between the two elections, suggesting that the Kurdish vote outside the south-east didn't necessarily vote for HADEP. As Güneş-Ayata and Ayata argue,

> In large metropolitan centres such as Istanbul and Izmir, voting patterns among Kurds show great variation ... compared to the east and the south-east, in large cities lifestyles are more diverse, traditional mechanisms of social control are weaker, the ethnic Kurdish communities are more stratified, and interaction with non-Kurds are more frequent both in the workplace and in public. Although ethnic identity is also a significant dimension of social interaction in everyday life, social and economic problems can be as significant as ethnic identity in influencing voting behaviour (Güneş-Ayata & Ayata, 2002, p. 145).

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The relatively low support amongst Kurdish migrants in western Turkey in the 1999 election further points towards HADEP becoming a regional party representing the views of Kurds living in the south-east. The unease with which many Kurds and left-leaning Turks felt towards HADEP was not helped by the pulling down of the Turkish flag during HADEP's 2nd Congress in June 1996 – it cast doubt on HADEP's claim to be a 'party of Turkey' and led to accusations of betrayal and treachery. The former co-chair of the HDP, explained in an interview with me that he believed that such events led to the low support for pro-Kurdish parties among Kurdish voters living in the west of Turkey:

> Kurds living in the western regions of Turkey had many reservations with previous pro-Kurdish parties [prior to the rise of HDP] as their priority was security and protection. HADEP, DTP and the other pro-Kurdish parties couldn't protect them, and support for them made them vulnerable in their workplace. The very fact that these parties had a problem with the state was alienating potential Kurdish voters (Former HDP co-chair, personal interview, 2018).

Through this, we can see broad trends materialising in the public discourse. Firstly, the mainstream narrative – from both Turkish politicians and the media – that HADEP and its predecessor parties were treacherous and therefore a marginal party that didn't belong in the Turkish political public life was a successful method in reducing the potential popularity of the pro-Kurdish parties. By marginalising and delegitimising the parties, the state not only succeeded in convincing Turkish voters of the dangers of pro-Kurdish parties, but it also acted as a disincentive for Kurds to vote along ethnic lines. Secondly, while HADEP's marginalisation clearly reduced their popularity across Turkey, it didn't stop Kurds in the south-east voting for them. In fact, as the 1999 local elections showed, such marginalisation legitimised the party in their eyes, and they increased in popularity. Thus, the marginalisation which was successful decreasing the party's popularity across

Turkey was doing the opposite in the Kurdish-majority south-east. In this, HADEP was becoming a de facto regional party that represented Kurds in the south-east.

Following the success of HADEP in 1999, the state launched prosecution against various HADEP members. Murat Bozlak, the former chairman of the party, and the chairman Ahmet Turan Demir were sentenced to nearly 4 years in February 2000 (*Hurriyet*, February 24th, 2002). In the 2002 general elections, due to the impending court case aiming to close down HADEP (it was eventually closed down in March 2003 for engaging in activities 'against the unity of the state and nation'), DEHAP contested the elections under the Emek, Barış ve Demokrasi Bloku (Labour, Peace and Democracy Block). The pro-Kurdish party won 6.12% of the national vote, and in the 2004 local elections won 8.76% of the vote as part of the pro-democracy block under the banner of the Social Democratic People's Party.

With the Constitutional Court considering to close down DEHAP, plans were being made to form a new party soon after the success of the local elections. In June 2004, the four former DEP MPs were released from jail after 9 years, and the accelerated the process of forming a new party. In November 2005, the Demokratik Toplum Partisi (DTP: Democratic Society Party) was formed, which integrated many mayors from DEHAP. However, partly due to the permanent ceasefire the PKK had declared following Abdullah Öcalan's capture in 1999, the significant reduction in conflict created possibilities for the DTP to promote reconciliation and democratic solutions. In this sense, DTP was able to reach out and represent a broader section of the society and attracted other political groups that its predecessors had failed to achieve.

HADEP's success in the 1999 election paved the way for the institutionalisation of pro-Kurdish politics on the municipal level across the south-east. Since winning 39 councils in 1999, pro-Kurdish parties have continued to strengthen their support base across the south-east, gaining 55 councils in 2004 and 96 in 2009. Furthermore, these parties have performed particular well in Kurdish urban cities in the south-east, such as Diyarbakir. In the 2004 local elections, DEHAP contested and won 58.3% of the vote, while the DTP contested and won as many as 66% in the 2009 elections. Throughout this period, from 1999 to 2012, pro-Kurdish parties became the de-facto major political parties across the majority of cities of the south-east.

In the 1999 election campaign, HADEP had campaigned enthusiastically on a local level, which is summarised by their slogan 'Kendimizi de kentimizi de biz yöneteceğiz' ('we will manage ourselves and our city on our own') (Demir, 2005, p.455). While they did not have representation in parliament until 2007, which limited their ability to provide an opposition on a national level, it did allow pro-Kurdish party activists to focus on building up their support base in the south-east.

Becoming the elected representatives over municipalities led to pro-Kurdish parties taking control of local budget allocations across the south-east. In 2005, pro-Kurdish mayors in Diyarbakir alone oversaw $197 million worth of local revenue. Nicole Watts argues that pro-Kurdish parties and officials used the resources of the local offices to establish an alternative governmental presence and to construct a Kurdish collective subject. This could be done through various initiatives focused on Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights. Watts argues that this was done through engaging in modernisation projects that were used to build a competing vision of their demand for

greater regional autonomy, as well as the extensive use of symbolic politics that

normalised Kurdishness through remarking the cultural and physical language as

Kurdish (Watts, 2010, pp.143-45). One striking example was the use of surveys by the

municipalities that were crafted so they could indicate pro-Kurdish preferences. Watts

references one survey in which 22% of respondents listed the Kurdish nationalist ROJ

TV station as the most frequently watched channel, while 29% cited "forced migration"

as the reason they came to Diyarbakir (Watts, 2012, p.147).

Likewise, the use of symbolic politics was used to Kurdify the public space

throughout the 2000s. Kurdish municipalities actively promoted Kurdish Newroz

festivals, often using local government funding to organise events surrounding the

festival. Moreover, language was used extensively to mark physical locations within a

Kurdish nationalist discourse. The most striking example of this was in Sur

Municipality, where Diyarbakir mayor Osman Baydemir adopted multilingualism in

local governance (çok dilli belediyecilik). In October 2016, Sur municipality voted to

provide official services in Kurdish, Turkish, English and Syriac. They also made

Kurdish an official language of the municipality, which led to Abdullah Demirbaş, the

local mayor, being removed from office and the municipal council disbanded by court

order in June 2007. As Baydemir says,

> For a long time during the conflict one of the goals of the state was to destroy
> Kurdish language and culture. One of the signs of peace would be to be able to
> use Kurdish freely, in public and official places. It was also very important as a
> way of re-establishing the municipality's relations with the people. As soon as I
> came into office we started using Kurdish in some official documents and in
> most meetings. The governor didn't like it – he told us to stop – but he couldn't
> do anything about it (Watts, 2010, p.151).

Despite the removal of the local mayor, such policies helped produce an alternative governmentality, which Michel Foucault defines as a style of governance in which the welfare and aspirations of a population become both the object and subject of rule (Foucault, 1991). Such a new governmentality helped to redefine the citizens in the south east as Kurdish, and therefore undermined Turkish authorities insistence of Turkishness. In this, the Kurdish municipalities' defiant pro-Kurdish policies helped to support their political program for greater autonomy as well as language and cultural rights for Kurds. Lastly, various administrative projects aimed at developing and modernising the city was used to buttress such claims for autonomy as it showed that a vehemently pro-Kurdish administration could manage their own affairs.

The importance of the production of a new governmentality was the role it played in transitioning the pro-Kurdish parties away from a party that simply aired grievances and demands to a party that produced competing political realities. Due to their success in the south-east, the party clearly showed both their Kurdish constituents and the rest of Turkey what they envisioned a future Turkey looking like. The 'Turkishness' of the country, from political parties' identity to the composition of Turkey's citizens was challenged fundamentally by reconstituting its constituents as Kurdish.

Such an experience gave HADEP vital hands-on experience of governance that neither HEP or DEP had managed, which crucially helped legitimise the party in the eyes of the Kurdish electorate. Surveying this period more broadly, HADEP and DEHAP's decision to focus their activism on a local level portrayed a certain versatility of pro-Kurdish parties. Given the increased polarisation at the end of the 1990s, and

continued assertions of separatism levelled against the parties, claiming control of

municipalities across the south-east was a welcome recalibration for Kurdish party

activism. With efforts focused on the regional rather than national focus that

characterised early Kurdish party activism in the 1990s, it showed the power of

remaining regional by nature, and thus raised the question of whether an exclusive focus

on Ankara and universalist discourses of democracy for the entirety of Turkey was the

right political strategy. Thus, in many ways, this period raises fundamental question

marks over the virtue or expedience of Türkiyelileşme as a political strategy.

4.3 The Return of a Kurdish opposition in parliament: DTP/BDP embrace parliament

2005-12

DTP continued their work much like their predecessor parties, but the inclusion of the

four former HEP deputies that had been imprisoned until 2004 gave the party a renewed

energy. In 2007, DTP successfully contested the election as independent candidates,

winning 5.2% on the national vote and leading to 22 pro-Kurdish deputies entering the

parliament for the first time in thirteen years (T24, 2007). Of the 22 deputies, there was a

mixture of old pro-Kurdish activists who had been involved in the previous Kurdish

parties, as well as new figures. Of particular note was Selahattin Demirtaş, the future co-

President of the HDP, who was one of four deputies elected from Diyarbakir. Akın

Birdal, a Turkish Human Rights activist who set up Turkey's Human Rights Association

and survived an assassination attempt in 1998, was also elected to Diyarbakir. The

President of ÖDP, the Freedom and Solidarity Party, Ufak Uras, was elected to Istanbul

along with Kurdish activist Sebahat Tuncer. Winning two seats in Istanbul was

important as it was the first seats outside the south-east that a pro-Kurdish party successfully contested.

The success of DTP was consolidated in the local elections held in March 2009, winning 99 Councils (and mayors) across the south-east with 5.70% of the national vote. This was a substantial improvement on the 55 councils that DEHAP won in the 2004 election. Through their success in getting pro-Kurdish deputies in parliament, as well as their success in these municipal elections, DTP were able to provide a strong regional and national presence. In many ways, the institutional base of DTP – a base which previous pro-Kurdish parties didn't have due to their lack of representation in parliament – allowed the deputies to raise important issues in parliament:

> In particular, being represented in the National Assembly gave DTP MPs a chance to discuss issues... [that] ranged from issues that the Kurds in a particular locality faced – for example education problems in the town of Hakkari – to more regional issues that were directly connected to the conflict, such as the fate of the people who disappeared under detention, the continual use of torture in police custody... On 13 March 2008, Pervin Buldan, the DTP MP for Kars, demanded that a parliamentary commission be established to investigate the extrajudicial murders which occurred during the 1990s (Güneş, 2012, p.170)

DTP's more active involvement in parliamentary politics coincided with a period when Turkey's EU accession process was high on the agenda, and therefore DTP made substantial efforts to build links with European political parties. While HEP and DEP had previously been in parliament, the parties lacked the grassroots organisation structure, as well as the success with which pro-Kurdish parties had been running numerous municipalities in the south-east. Moreover, in contrast to HEP's entrance into Parliament in 1991 when Zana spoke in Kurdish, DTP deputies appeared to have learnt that such provocative behaviour was not conducive to dialogue. Upon entering

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parliament, prominent Kurdish politician Ahmet Türk deliberately shook Devlet

Bahçeli's hand, which many commenters interpreted as DTP's belief in dialogue over

conflict. Thus, this new found conciliatory approach that allowed the pro-Kurdish

deputies to establish and integrate themselves more thoroughly with mainstream Turkish

politics. Such an approach, coupled with their ability to give voice to Kurdish demands

in parliament, allowed for DTP to get their voice heard at a national level. Furthermore,

compared to the 1990s, the Kurdish conflict was relatively low-key, and therefore

allowed for more political space to debate the sensitive issues at the heart of the Kurdish

conflict.

However, much like its predecessors, the DTP struggled to be seen as a

legitimate political party. The war with the PKK began to deteriorate after the 2005

ceasefire broke down. The government continuously accused the party of being linked to

the PKK, which was not helped by the fact that many of the demands of the DTP were

similar to the Kurdish militant. One striking example was DTP's proposal for

'Democratic Autonomy' in 2007 (Bianet, 2007) – while on paper this simply envisioned

an establishment of regional bodies to decentralise power in the long term, it was a

proposal that incarcerated PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan had been developing over the

last decade. From the state's perspective, the ideological imprint of the party came

directly from the PKK leader.

In 2007, AKP performed surprisingly well in the south-east, outperforming the

DTP in a number of provinces. AKP's popularity in the south-east stemmed from its

public battle with the Turkish military over the appointment of a new president gave

hope amongst Kurds that such a challenge to the military establishment made the

governing party more likely to accommodate Kurdish demands. Moreover, whilst pro-Kurdish parties had successfully ran a number of municipalities in the south-east, an AKP representative in parliament would more likely lead to an improvement in services.

The results of 2007 led to a concerted effort by the AKP to win various Kurdish cities in the 2009 municipal elections, and led many to believe that AKP could provide an alternative pro-Kurdish party to the DTP. In the election campaign, the AKP argued that the DTP represented Kurdish interests only, and accused them of ethnic nationalism compared to their 'politics of service'. However, such a narrative failed to convince many Kurdish voters, with DTP performing well across the south-east. Gumuscu and Sert argue that the stalling of promised reforms as well as AKP's tendency to develop solutions to the conflict without any input from Kurds were the primary reasons that AKP's support in the south-east declined in the 2009 elections (2010, p.64).

The 2009 municipal elections appeared to confirm the growing support for an ethnic nationalism in the south-east, something the Turkish military voiced concern over in the aftermath of the elections (Hürriyet, 2009). This may partly explain why the Constitutional Court decided to close the party in December 2009, claiming that DTP became "the focal point of activities against the indivisible unity of the state, the country, and the nation" (Güneş, 2012, p.172).

Since DTP's closure, Kurdish party activism shifted to the Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (BDP: Peace and Democracy Party), which was established in 2008 to circumvent the expected closure of DTP. Much like DTP, the focus of the party has been continuing on works towards finding a democratic solution to the Kurdish conflict, as

well as an attempt to bring in inclusive figures from across Turkey to try and broaden their appeal beyond the south-east.

However, since the BDP was founded, the government took an increasingly hawkish approach to the Kurdish conflict. Following DTP's election success, in April 2009 an operation was launched which became known as the 'KCK trials.' The KCK were established by Abdullah Öcalan in 2005, soon after the PKK resumed its armed conflict with the Turkish state, and is often interpreted as the operationalization of Öcalan's idea of 'democratic autonomy/confederalism' (Casier and Jongerden, 2011 and 2012). Sometimes referred to as the urban wing of the movement, the KCK was established to take a more proactive role in influencing civil politics. Until the establishment of KCK, the militant organisation had not taken such a step to institutionalise their involvement in civilian politics, and reflected the growing consensus within Kurdish society that a resolution to the conflict could only be solved through Kurdish representation at a local and national level.

From the state's point of view, the establishment of KCK was illustrative of the growing influence of the PKK on Kurdish party politics at a national and local level. Although the KCK was established in 2005, the operation against the organisation was only launched following DTP's election success in the March 2009 municipal elections, and was undoubtedly brought forward in order to limit the success of the pro-Kurdish group. With the closure of DTP in December 2009, the trials focused on criminalising the activities of BDP party activists.

The indictment described the KCK as an organisation established to legitimize the PKK's aims and to increase their popularity through adopting a more civil outlook (sivil görünümlü). Moreover, the indictment argues that KCK's goal for 'democratic autonomy' is in fact illegal in that it seeks to eventual lead to an independent Kurdistan (Güneş and Zeydanlioğlu, 2013). In this, the prosecution aims to draw parallels between BDP and PKK's ideological goals, thereby showing the links between the two organisations.

However, while similar prosecutions against pro-Kurdish parties have led to the Constitutional Court closing down the parties, the convictions did not lead to a party closure, but instead led to heavy sentences given to party members. As Güneş and Zeydanlioğlu argue, the KCK trials indicate the emergence of a new legal strategy against Kurdish political parties:

> For the first time, and despite the 'strong' evidence, the public prosecutor's office chose not to bring a party-closure case before the Constitutional Court against a pro-Kurdish political party. Perhaps one of the reasons for this change in legal strategy is Turkey's desire to avoid criticism for yet another political party-closure case, since it has already been severely criticised internationally... Moreover, the closure of political parties has not ultimately stopped the mobilisation of the Kurdish political opposition, and has only meant the banning of a few leading party members from engaging openly in politics. The mass trials of the KCK, with charges involving heavy sentences, instead have the capacity for eliminating and pacifying the Kurdish opposition with consequences beyond that of the political party-closure cases" (Güneş and Zeydanlioğlu, 2013).

In total, more than 8,000 people were detained as part of the operation, with almost 4,000 of them formally arrested. The operation coincided with the 2011 June general election, where the government pursued an increasingly hard-line stance to the Kurdish issue in the campaign. Five of BDP's candidates who successfully won a seat in the election were unable to take their seat in parliament as they were being held in prison on

charges of belonging to a terrorist organisation (Gareth Jenkins, 2011). The trials, which also led to the arrest of more than 70 journalists and intellectuals, aimed to criminalise the BDP as an associate of the PKK, and thereby delegitimise the party in the public's eyes. However, BDP performed surprisingly well in the 2011 election, managing to increase their representation in parliament with 36 deputies entering parliament.

Despite the state oppression, both DTP and BDP benefited from the institutional stability the party had from the period of municipal control since HADEP's electoral victory in 1999. Not only did it institutionalise Kurdish politics more thoroughly into Turkey's politics, but such an electoral base was crucial in securing party funds and gaining support across the country. Despite this period of institutional stability, the KCK trials represented a setback for legal pro-Kurdish activism given the gains they made in the 2009 municipal elections. Once again it showed that state coercion had the ability to marginalise pro-Kurdish parties' status, and thus showed how such a state policy was being utilised as a pushback against attempts that were made by Kurdish deputies to normalise pro-Kurdish political discourse within Ankara.

Thus, in conclusion, this chapter has sought to offer a historical analysis of the pro-Kurdish political parties that preceded HDP. Much like the 1960s and 1970s, the period is marked by cooperation and separation from Turkish left-leaning political parties. The ability for pro-Kurdish parties to cooperate rested on the contextual circumstances of the PKK conflict. For example, the death of Özal and intensification of the conflict from the summer of 1993 led to a more hawkish policy on the part of the Turkish state against the DEP, which forced the party into a 'marginal' status. Furthermore, the level of radicalisation on the part of pro-Kurdish legal parties depended

on whether there was cooperation with political parties on Turkey's left. While the 1960s involved cooperation with Turkey's socialists, partly as a result of the 1980 coup and its subsequent decimation of the Turkish left, in the 1990s Erdal İnönü's liberal SHP offered the best opportunity of cooperation for Kurdish activists. However, while the period of cooperation in the 1960s and early 1990s can be differentiated by the different partners Kurds worked with (socialists/liberals), it is clear that both periods saw the emergence of language that prioritised pluralism and civil rights of Kurds over the more nationalist radicalism that characterised the 1970s and late 1990s. Throughout both periods, Kurdish activists sought to persuade their political partners to drop the uniform nationalist language that characterised Turkish politicians referencing of the Kurdish question, and instead instil the debate with a more thoroughly pluralistic language that emphasised the inclusion of minorities across Turkey.

CHAPTER 5

THE EMERGENCE OF THE HDP 2012-2018

Having provided a historical overview and analysed the experience of the pro-Kurdish

political parties prior to the establishment of HDP, this chapter will delve into HDP's

experience as a political party in Turkey. Much in a similar vein to the previous chapter,

it will focus on giving a historical narrative of pro-Kurdish political party activism.

Alongside such a narrative, I also include interviews with HDP MPs and journalists to

analyse the developments of the party. In this way, this chapter includes much more

discussion on the debate surrounding Türkiyelileşme, and the success at transforming

into a party that appeals to the non-Kurdish electorate.

The first section analyses the first two years of HDP after it was established in

2012 up until the dissolution of BDP as it became incorporated into the HDP following

the municipal March 2014 elections. Throughout this period, I discuss the difficulties

with which HDP attempted to convince both legal Kurdish activists and the wider

Kurdish movement of the project of HDP. Furthermore, the sub-chapter includes an

analysis of how the very composition of members distinguishes it from its predecessor

parties.

The second section looks at the electoral breakthrough that HDP experienced

both in the 2014 Presidential and 2015 June elections. This period remains a crucial

period of study for scholars of pro-Kurdish party politics in Turkey as a number of key

events took place in what would be the last year of the so-called peace process. I analyse

the reasons behind HDP's success, and how they managed to articulate their vision of

Türkiyelileşme where others had failed. Such a period can be considered the height of the Türkiyelileşme project, where the personal charisma of Demirtaş in particular allowed for the party to truly become a national party by transforming into an effective oppositional party that challenged AKP's hegemony.

Lastly, I seek to understand the process which led to the breakdown of peace following the June 2015 election. I start by analysing the developments that led to the breakdown of peace, before looking at the state pressure against the party. In this later section, I provide interviews to help contextualise and understand the scale of state pressure against the party, and how such coercion affected the party's ability to function. It was in this period where once again state pressures forced the party into the margins of Turkish political life and succeeded in delegitimising them in the eyes of the Turkish public. However, I also argue that despite shifting public perception of the party, such a process has failed to break the 'political will' or the broad-based leftist alliance with Turkish socialists.

5.1 The emergence of HDP during peacetime 2012-14

In the 2011 elections, despite the resounding success of the ruling AKP party who secured nearly 50% of the electoral vote, BDP contested the election as independents to circumvent the 10% threshold and secured 5.67% of the national vote, and 35 deputies were elected.[7] The election was a considerable improvement on the 22 deputies who had previously been elected in 2007. Furthermore, AKP's appeal amongst Kurds clearly

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[7] The alliance originally won 36 seats but the election of Hatip Dicle in Diyarbakir was later annulled by the Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey due to a prior conviction for spreading terrorist propaganda.

diminished, with their share of the vote in the 12 provinces with a significant Kurdish population reducing from 53% in 2007 to 37.4% in 2011, while BDP's independent candidates securing 50.8% of the votes (Santana, 2012, p.176). BDP had negotiated an electoral alliance with seventeen smaller parties and NGOs from across Turkey, known as the 'Labour, Peace and Democracy Block' (Emek, Demokrasi ve Özgürlük Bloku). The block included independent candidates such as the film director Sırrı Süreyya Önder and EMEP leader Levent Tüzel for Istanbul, and the leftist writer and activist Ertuğrul Kürkçü for Mersin. Such a tactic of negotiating alliances with prominent Turkish leftist figures was not new – in the 1990s there had been encouraging if ultimately unsuccessful attempts at such an alliance with İnönü's SHP; Likewise, in the 2007 election DTP had supported pro-democratic Turkish socialist candidates from the EMEP (Emek Partisi, Labour Party) and the ÖDP (Freedom and Solidarity Party) in Western Turkey as part of the 'Thousand Hope Candidates' (Bin Umut Bağımsız Adayları). Considering DTP's results of the municipal elections in 2009, where they failed to appeal to voters outside the majority Kurdish regions, such a tactic proved successful as they made inroads into establishing themselves as a party that appealed to a broad cross section of Turkish society.

In October 2011, four months after the 2011 elections, HDK (Halkın Demokrasi Kongresi, the People's Democratic Congress) was formed which aimed to unite struggles for democracy and equality as part of a wider counter-hegemonic force. HDP was founded a year later in October 2012 as the political vehicle of the Congress. All the groups who joined the Labour, Peace and Democracy Block electoral alliance participated in the establishment of the Congress, along with a number of smaller LGBT

and women organisations as well. The parties included the Labour Party, the Green Left Party (YSP, Yeşil Sol Partisi), the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP), the Socialist Democracy Party (SDP) as well as prominent figures from the Alevi and Armenian minorities. While the Congress was initially suggested by Öcalan, and thus it was presumed that they could count on the support of the pro-PKK electoral base, the former co-chair of the party explained to me in an interview the difficulty with which the PKK supported such a proposal:

> Öcalan spent much political energy trying to persuade the Kurdish movement's civilian cadres to accept an all-Turkey, Türkiyeli party together with Turkey's left democratic forces that would represent an entirely new party, rather than a simple extension of the previous parties. From the late 2000s onwards, Öcalan's work speaks to a potential conjuncture between the Turkish left and the Kurdish movement to achieve a democratic republic through democratic autonomy. However, the success of such a project rested on the conditions that the nation state was prepared to accept the existence of a multi-cultural and multi-national society, and that the PKK were willing to set aside their separatist claims and give a chance to a peaceful transformation of the country. These were the particularities and nature of the period when HDP was founded, and it was with this potential conjuncture in mind that Öcalan believed an entirely new party needed to be created. HDP was the product of such a discussion (HDP former co-chair, personal interview, 2018).

Considering that the predecessor pro-Kurdish parties had continuously sought to broaden their appeal to voters outside of the Kurdish-majority regions through electoral alliances, what were the characteristics of HDP that made it an entirely new party? While previous parties had sought to include non-Kurdish voices within the party through socialist figures like Ertuğrul Kürkçü and Ufuk Uras who represented BDP as an MP after DTP's closure in December 2009, HDP contained a huge array of independent voices and identities within the party itself. Thus, it is clear that previous parties had generally attempted to reach beyond their Kurdishness through electoral alliances, but the vast majority of their members and elected representatives remained

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ethnically Kurdish. In contrast, HDP was built out of a platform of Kurdish, Turkish

leftist, Alevi, Armenian, women and other oppressed minorities. Within the party

structure itself, the eş başkanlık system of co-leadership system not only ensured gender

parity [leadership shared between a male and female leader], but also parity between the

Kurdish movement and non-Kurdish representation within the party. From HDP's birth

until today, HDP's co-leaders have always been shared equally with one originating

from the Kurdish movement and the other representing the Turkish wing of the party. As

one Kurdish journalist explained,

> When HDP was established, it was decided that the co-chairs should represent
> the broad views of the party. Ertuğrul Kürkçü – as the only survivor of the
> Kızıldere incident, he was a prominent figure from the Çayan tradition of the
> Turkish left – was selected alongside Sebahat Tuncel who had been involved in
> the Kurdish movement since the 1990s. Kürkçü was essential in convincing non-
> Kurds that HDP had a direct connection to the Turkish left, while Tuncel was
> chosen to convince Kurds that the Kurdish movement would continue to play a
> prominent part in the party's discourse. This policy of choosing co-chairs from
> both wings of the party has continued to this day – both with Selahattin Demirtaş
> and Figen Yüksekdağ, and with the current leadership of Sezai Temeli and
> Pervin Buldan. In this way, HDP differentiated itself from its predecessor parties
> – while DTP and BDP had broadly the same ideological basis as HDP, the actual
> membership and representation within the party was transformed by HDP in that
> the party was genuinely represented by a range of identities and ideologies such
> as the Turkish leftist tradition and the Kurdish Islamist tradition alongside the
> Kurdish movement (Kurdish journalist, personal interview, 2018).

Thus, HDP's defining feature that separates it from merely being a successor party to the

previous pro-Kurdish parties was not an ideological distinction as such, but rather its

very composition of members. However, being a party that has attempted to unite the

Kurdish and Turkish democratic voices together was no easy task, and the tension with

which the different groups that co-exist within the party continues to this day. As the

Kurdish journalist told me, from the beginning there was a nervousness and fear from

the Turkish left that the party would simply become a mouthpiece for the Kurdish

movement. Likewise, as the former co-chair alluded to above, many within the Kurdish movement remained unconvinced that the Turkish left was a reliable ally. In order for such a political alliance to be successful, Öcalan had to convince the Kurdish national movement to forfeit their national demands in favour of purely democratic demands. As Güneş explained, the Kurds attempt to form a wider democratic movement highlighted the tension between 'particularity' and 'universality':

> While the articulation of Kurdish identity within democratic discourse opens up the possibility to adapt a critical line in relation to the essentialist claims articulated by nationalists, and the homogenising tendency that nationalisms harbour, balancing the articulation of 'particularistic' national demands with more 'universal' democratic demands is of paramount importance. The important issue to consider is the limitations that this tension places on a national movement to deviate from making national claims by placing universal democratic demands at the centre of its political discourse (Güneş, 2012, p.183).

In this, we can clearly see Öcalan's desire to transform Turkey from a homogenised nation-state into a multi-national society. Through the mobilisation of a universalist democratic discourse, HDP have attempted to portray themselves as a transformative party that can successfully challenge the homogenising tendency of the Turkish nation. However, the tension that Güneş speaks of originates from the prevalent 'particularist' national identity claims which Kurds continue to vocalise. Here lies the contradiction of HDP, and that of previous pro-Kurdish parties, in that the party campaigns around a universalist democratic discourse, whilst simultaneously representing a core party base that continues to contain a particular Kurdish nationalism within it. A case in point is Şeref Kavak's thesis on the DTP, which argues that while DTP's party elites and spokespersons believed the party to be a broad-based non-ethnic Türkiyeli party, the grassroots of the party continued to perceive the party as an ethnic party that prioritised their ethnic Kurdish concerns (Kavak, 2010). With this in mind, and perhaps in

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acknowledgement that grassroots Kurdish activists will never cease their particularist identity claims, a sister organisation in the form of DBP (Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi, the Democratic Regions' Party) was established alongside HDP to represent Kurdish interests entirely in the south-east. As the former co-chair explained to me, "the Kurds need to have their own voice, to channel their particular messages from Kurdistan. For this reason, DBP was set up so Kurds would not lose their ability to convey particularist Kurdish demands as an autonomous unit separate from HDP."

In the municipal elections in March 2014, the government was still adjusting to the fallout from the Gezi protests the previous summer and the December 17 corruption probe launched by the Gulen movement. As a result, the Gulen-AKP controversy dominated the public discussion in the build-up to the election. Thus, "the public debate surrounding the December 17 operations thus turned the local elections into a vote of confidence for the AK Party government – a fact that both government officials and opposition parties acknowledged prior to the elections by gearing their campaigns toward this objective" (Coşkun, 2014, p.62). BDP – who, due to the ongoing peace process, were the only oppositional party not to campaign against the government's corruption charges – contested the election in the Kurdish-majority south-east while HDP contested municipalities in west Turkey. In total, BDP-HDP managed to secure 6.2% of the national vote and 102 councils – an increase from the 98 councils DTP secured with 5.7% of the national vote in the 2009 municipal elections.

The results of the elections were seen as a victory for both the AKP and BDP. The BDP continued to cement their claim as the representative of Kurdish interests in the south-east, while the AKP continued to perform well in the region. Considering that

both AKP and BDP were the leading advocates and facilitators of the direct talks

between the government and the PKK leadership, the success of both parties in the local

elections indicated the widespread support the peace process had in the region. In fact,

during the election campaign, Gülten Kışanak – the mayoral candidate for Diyarbakir

and co-chair of BDP at the time – said that the elections represented a 'make or break'

juncture for the peace process: "There is a feeling that if ... we achieve a stronger

election result, the peace process will advance. But, if we relax and our votes decline, we

Kurds fear that the peace process could collapse" (Voice of America, 2014). As the role

of official coordinator between the Kurdish movement and the state in the peace process,

BDP used the electoral platform to campaign for their demand of democratic autonomy

from centralised authority. On March 9th, the BDP delegation that visited Öcalan

conveyed his message that the local elections of March 30th represented "a referendum

for Kurds … to test their democratic autonomy" (SETA, 2014, p.20).

However, while BDP used the election to cement support for their decentralised

system of governance as part of the wider peace process, HDP campaigned in western

Turkey hoping to capitalise on the political energy created by the Gezi protests. The

hope was that, given BDP was considered to be a particularist Kurdish party by Turkish

voters, HDP would be able to overcome such ethnic limitations and develop a platform

that could appeal to diverse social groups across the country.

Nonetheless, while BDP performed well in the south-east, HDP's elections

results were disappointing across the western provinces. In Istanbul, Adana and Mersin

– three provinces in the west where BDP had performed best in the 2009 local election

and 2011 parliamentary election – support for HDP dropped compared to BDP's

previous results. In Mersin, where BDP had won 17% in the 2009 local elections, HDP only took 9.6%. Likewise, in Adana they won 7.3%, a drop from the 9% they took in 2009. Likewise, in Istanbul, there was hope's that HDP's mayoral candidate, the hugely popular Sırrı Süreyya Önder who had been a leading voice during the Gezi resistance, would gain as much as 10%. However, the results were hugely disappointing, with Önder only secured 4.6% of the city's vote (Coşkun, 2014, pp.70-71).

Such results showed the limitations of the HDP project. Many concluded that the party only received votes from Kurdish voters who were loyal to the movement, while others felt they would have performed better if they stood as BDP in the western provinces as well. One commentator noted that "it became clear that the HDP received support from BDP loyalists and failed to lure away voters from the party's competitors… the election results thus required the Kurdish political movement to reconsider the merits of their HDP project and reform the BDP's political platform to attract new voters" (Coşkun, 2014, pp.70-71).

While the decision for BDP and HDP to run separately in the eastern and western Anatolian provinces was officially announced as a tactic for HDP to capture the Gezi political energy and appeal to non-Kurdish voters, the co-chair of HDP at the time revealed to me the difficulties of such a period between Kurds loyal to the BDP and the newly-formed HDP:

> The March elections were hugely problematic for us as the BDP were wary of the HDP and resisted joining HDP at the time. The original idea for the election was for HDP to run in every municipality instead of BDP, but most of the BDP membership wanted to retain their municipalities as a Kurdish party. Demirtaş himself was one of the vocal voices against HDP and so it was decided that BDP would run on their own ticket in the south-east. In their minds, they didn't want

to surrender to Turks; this was the idea prevalent at the time. At that time, HDP was still new and the significance of the party wasn't fully understood (HDP former co-chair, personal interview, 2018).

Such disagreements between HDP and BDP at the time underline the reservations Kurds had towards uniting fully behind a pan-Türkiyeli party that was divorced from vocalising Kurdish particularist identity claims. Retaining a Kurdish party was considered key in campaigning for Kurdish rights, while HDP's political platform was considered too universal in its drive for further democratisation of state and society. Furthermore, while BDP's election campaign focused on the particularist needs of Kurds – language and cultural rights, as well as the completion of a Kurdish peace process – HDP focused much of their energy on capturing the resistance spirit of Gezi through figures such as Sırrı Süreyya Önder. Thus, while Öcalan had engineered a new party that aimed to reach beyond a Kurdish base, Kurds themselves held some reservations about forfeiting their national and identity claims as Kurds. Cemil Bayık, a leading PKK leader in Qandil who represents a more militant, hawkish wing of the movement, and the Islamist Kurdish MP Altan Tan, were leading dissenting voices against the proposed HDP project.

In response to HDP's disappointing electoral performance, in April 2014 it was decided that BDP would be dissolved and its entire parliamentary caucus joined HDP (Daily Sabah, 2014). BDP was assigned to exclusively represent at a local administration level, and during the party's 3rd Congress in July that year, BDP changed its name to DBP and its activities were restricted to the local and regional level. As the former co-chair explained, with the help of Öcalan, leading figures of BDP were

convinced of the need to transit into the HDP structure and Demirtaş assumed the role of leadership.

Thus, with such changes, the HDP project had been completed. Up until the 2014 local elections, HDP remained an unknown quantity, which was reflected in their poor election results. Due to BDP's decision to run separately, Kurdish voters living in western Turkey remained unconvinced of the merits of the HDP and whether they could truly represent their interests. With the arrival of the 32 deputies from HDP – who joined the 4 HDP MPs who were already inside the party – HDP had finally transformed itself into a party that merged leading figures from the Kurdish national movement with Turkish leftists and democrats. The marriage between the two was finally complete eighteen months after the party was established, and as a result, they combined to exceed all expectations in the upcoming presidential elections.

5.2 HDP's breakthrough: The 2014 presidential election and June 2015 election

Four months after the merging of BDP deputies into the HDP, Turkey's first ever presidential elections took place in Turkey. Previously the Presidency was chosen by Parliament, but in 2007 the AKP government passed a constitutional amendment that stipulated that elections would take place for the office of President, the first to be held in 2014. At the time, Erdoğan advocated his desire to change the constitution in order to transform the presidency from its mostly ceremonial role into a powerful executive role, something which he eventually achieved via the constitutional referendum in 2017 (NPR, 2014). The CHP had reached out to other parties in order to find a "consensus

candidate", and eventually opted to nominate the little known former diplomat Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu as a joint candidate with the nationalist MHP. HDP had held talks with CHP in the hope that an electoral alliance could be reached, but after CHP chose to appeal to the more nationalist segment of the country through their alliance with MHP, HDP nominated the young lawyer Demirtaş, who had recently assumed the co-chair role within the HDP.

While both İhsanoğlu and Demirtaş campaigned against a strong presidency, the election was also considered a test of Erdoğan's popularity considering the public controversies that continued to dominate the debate at the time: not just the challenge of the Gezi protests a year before and the fallout with the Gulen movement which had led to four ministers resigning, but three months prior to the election the Soma mining tragedy exposed the government's failure to regulate health and safety procedures.

Despite HDP's emphasis on democratization and attempts to appeal to non-Kurdish voters, its failure to garner significant support in western constituencies in the March local elections highlighted that, much like its predecessors, the party had failed in attracting such voters. However, in the Presidential elections, HDP managed to draw votes from the non-Kurdish electorate. While Erdoğan won the election with 51.8% of the vote, Demirtaş exceeded all expectation with 9.8%. Çiçek's analysis compares pro-Kurdish parties' previous election results with Demirtaş's performance in the presidential elections, and concludes that the Presidential elections represented the best ever of any pro-Kurdish party in Turkey's electoral history (Çiçek, 2014). Until 2014, HDP and all the previous pro-Kurdish parties that had contested elections generally

garnered between 4-6% of the popular vote, with the 6.57% secured in the 2011 general elections representing their best performance.

A large reason behind Demirtaş's success rested on his ability to garner support from non-Kurdish voters, in particularly urban youth residing in western Turkey who traditionally voted for CHP. Such a performance is partly explained by the uninspired campaign of Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, who many believed was too conservative a candidate to fit the profile of CHP. As a renowned Islamic scholar, İhsanoğlu had strong Islamic credentials and the party had hoped that he would make inroads into the religious conservative which made up the powerbase of the AK party. Not only did such a strategy fail, with İhsanoğlu securing only 38.4% – considerably less than the 43% CHP and MHP took in the local elections five months earlier – but it also alienated more progressive CHP voters towards Demirtaş. Some commenters have estimated that some 8.4% of those who voted for CHP in the March local elections voted for Demirtaş in the presidential elections (Open Democracy, 2014). The former co-chair told me that Demirtaş's success in the elections was due to his ability to connect with urban CHP voters:

> After BDP's decision to join HDP, we finally had a party that was all-Turkey in its composition – a party supported by the Kurdish movement while also simultaneously resonating with progressive Turkish democrats across the country, and this gave us a solid foundation going into the presidential elections. While the fragile İhsanoğlu struggled to get his voice heard, Demirtaş's youthful image and campaign resonated with the CHP ranks who felt affectionate towards him. There was a feeling at the time that if he was not a Kurd and wasn't the favoured choice of Öcalan, he would be their candidate. What this meant is CHP voters, and youth across Turkey generally, were impressed by Demirtaş's image, and wished CHP could have produced a candidate with such a youthful energy. This allowed Demirtaş to secure a third more votes than we'd ever received, and we created a kind of critical mass that gave HDP a national character. When we speak about Türkiyelileşme, this is what this is – a complete transition from

regional to national in character. The 2014 presidential election was the moment HDP managed to achieve this – for the first time, a pro-Kurdish party had truly achieved national status (HDP former co-chair, personal interview, 2018).

Thus, in the former co-chair's understanding, the presidential elections represents the moment HDP succeeded in their project of Türkiyelileşme which encompasses a transformation process from being a regional party focused on campaigning for improved cultural rights for Kurds into a national party that focuses on all issues across Turkey. Demirtaş's campaign successfully appealed to non-Kurdish voters who had previously voted for CHP, and as a result the prevailing discourse within the party at the time was that the party had managed to become national in character, unlike the previous pro-Kurdish parties who, despite campaigning on general issues across Turkey, remained particularist in character. Furthermore, according to the former co-chair, Demirtaş's success rests on CHP essentially seeing him as 'one of their own', meaning that HDP had produced a candidate that influenced a wider spectrum of society for the first time. This was highlighted in the 2018 Presidential election when CHP fielded the energetic Muharrem İnce, with many comparing his campaign – which contained a more liberal pluralist agenda with a small dose of populism as well – to Demirtaş's youthful energy.

Importantly, Demirtaş's was successful during the 2014 presidential election campaign in being seen as the only genuine oppositional candidate, in comparison to İhsanoğlu. Much like the March local elections, the presidential elections results were seen as a clear success for the ruling AKP and the HDP. Described by his supporters as "the candidate of the oppressed", Demirtaş captured the imagination of much of the country by employing a left-wing discourse that focused on discrimination in Turkey.

Rather than focusing on garnering support in the south-east, he campaigned across the

country, and in accordance with his claim to represent disadvantaged sections of society,

he met women's groups, LGBT organisations and paid a visit to the site of the Soma

mining accident. Furthermore, Bakiner and Baser argued that he employed the media

wisely, with interviews with his family showing 'that he led simple, unpretentious lives

… with his witty reminders of the enormous wealth gap between himself and Erdoğan

served to accentuate this image" (Bakiner & Baser, 2014, p.16).

Thus, Demirtaş successfully campaigned on a message of solidarity that went

across ethnic lines in a hope to overcome perceptions of the conflict between the

Kurdish militants and Turkish state. Instead of focusing on the bloody conflict, Demirtaş

focused on minority rights more generally, demanding greater human rights to protect

freedom of speech, as well as referencing the importance of the Gezi protests. In the

process, Demirtaş publicly expressed a Türkiyelileşme message by arguing that the HDP

was a party for all the peoples of Turkey who were discriminated by the ring-wing

political establishment. Despite the fact that Türkiyelileşme had been discussed by pro-

Kurdish parties since 2005, Demirtaş's campaign – which also promised to end the

stigmatization of non-Muslims and Alevis – was likely the first time that most Turks

observed a pro-Kurdish party attempting to reach beyond their ethnic electorate

(Kalaycıoğlu, 2015, p.164). However, despite such a successful campaign, pro-

government analysts saw the shift in political discourse of Demirtaş and HDP as

displaying populist politics at the expense of the peace process:

> His campaign sought to address the Kurdish political movement's desire to reach
> out to the entire country through simplistic projects rather than genuine political
> initiatives. Instead of building on the Kurdish political movement's political

experience to expand his base with reference to democracy, the Demirtaş campaign has thus far relied on anti-Erdoğan populism in the hope of finding convenient shortcuts to popularity. In this regard, he has sent mixed signals to the electorate for the sake of speaking to multiple constituencies and re-invented his rhetoric from scratch. In doing so, Demirtaş revised his position on the Kurdish peace process, Gezi Park protests, and the Gülenist shadow state (Ete, 2014).

The idea that Demirtaş's campaign was putting the peace process in jeopardy rested on the idea that a peace process was going to be achieved through bargaining between the pro-Kurdish party and the ruling AK party. During the Gezi protests in the summer of 2013, where a consolidated oppositional discourse was consolidated against Erdoğan's increasingly authoritarian rule, there had been lingering distrust of the pro-Kurdish parties of BDP and HDP due to the fear that the pro-Kurdish party would compromise their democratic instincts and lend support to Erdoğan's executive presidential system in return for a peace process. This was partly due to the minutes from a HDP delegation to visit Öcalan on İmralı Island that had been leaked to the press in February 2013: "We can think about the presidency. We can support Mr Tayyip's presidency. We can align with the AKP about the presidency" (T24, 2014). However, Demirtaş's campaign sought to address such concerns from the Turkish leftist electorate, and showed that a peace process does not have to be pursued through such bargaining and collaboration with the ruling AKP.

The anti-Erdoğan rhetoric pursued by Demirtaş during his presidential campaign continued following the election, and was captured by the co-leader of HDP's slogan – which had originated during HDP parliamentary meeting in March 2015 – of 'we won't let you be elected as President' (seni başkan yaptırmayacağız). In this speech, which many have identified as the moment HDP truly cemented their anti-Erdoğan oppositional credentials and underlined their discourse for the upcoming June elections,

Demirtaş vowed never to enter into dirty negotiations with the AKP and pledged not to allow Erdoğan to be elected as president. "Mr Erdoğan," Demirtaş announced, "as long as HDP exists, as long as HDP members will breath, you won't be the president." Demirtaş's last words were as follows: "Mr Recep Tayyıp Erdoğan, we won't let you be elected as the President, we won't let you be elected as the President, and we won't let you be elected as the President!" (Bianet, 2015).

As well as such shifts in political discourses on the part of HDP, regional developments also had an impact on the AKP's relationship with HDP. In October 2014, a number of violent protests erupted across the Kurdish-populated south-east in protest against the AKP's attitude during the siege of Kobane. Since September 2014, PKK-aligned Syrian Kurdish fighters (YPG) had been battling ISIS militants in the Syrian Kurdish town of Kobane. This not only raised the profile of the PKK to an international setting, but the militants – which included a significant number of Kurds coming from Turkey – managed to portray themselves as heroic defenders resisting against the brutality of ISIS. To confound matters, as Kobane was situated right on the Turkish border, more than 200,000 Kurdish refugees fled the besieged city into neighbouring Turkey (Amnesty, 2014). As the situation deteriorated inside Kobane, many Kurds in Turkey felt their government was not doing enough to support the heroic stand of the Kurdish fighters against ISIS's advancement. After Erdoğan said that 'Kobane is about to fall' during a speech in Gaziantep in early October 2014 (Independent, 2014), Demirtaş and the HDP held a press conference where they called for Kurds to take to the streets in support of the Kobane defence and against what they believed was the Turkish government's tacit support for the Islamic State (Gürçan, Al Monitor, 2014). In October

6-8th, violent clashes erupted in the south-east in which more than 50 people were estimated to have lost their lives. According to Amnesty International, the clashes mainly involved supporters of the YPG defence and supporters of Hüda Par, a Kurdish Islamist party who many saw as supporting ISIS (Amnesty, 2015).

Such clashes, as well as Turkey's hard-line response to such clashes, reignited simmering tensions between the government and the HDP, as well as between different Kurdish political actors. While both the government and HDP blamed each other for the violent clashes, it also created a serious rupture in the reconciliation process. Vahap Coşkun argued that the return of violence to the streets in the south-east during the Kobane protests threatened to derail the whole peace process:

> The primary selling point for the [peace] talks had been the lack of violent conflict and bloodshed. The casualties and a wave of clashes that wreaked havoc in major urban centres effectively stripped the peace process of its main source of legitimacy. Meanwhile, the violent protests jeopardized the common ground between various groups of different ideological backgrounds that, over the course of the talks, had helped keep efforts to derail the process under control. It was this particular damage inflicted by the clashes that represented the greatest threat to dialogue and caused widespread concern over the future of the peace process (Coşkun, 2015).

These developments meant a significant shift in the discourse of Kurds was taking place across the south-east. The popularity of Demirtaş's anti-Erdoğan rhetoric in the presidential campaign, coupled with the Kobane effect and violent clashes that erupted in October, meant the language to describe AKP's relationship vis-à-vis the Kurds was transforming. The feeling that the ruling AKP represented the Kurds best hope of securing lasting peace began to fade, which was partly due to the frustration with the lack of development of the peace talks.

This in turn had an effect on HDP, who were attempting to capitalize on the confidence with which Kurds were demanding justice. Furthermore, the project of Türkiyelileşme assumed a shift to the left from the HDP which was not as evident with previous pro-Kurdish parties. While the predecessor pro-Kurdish parties had always chosen to express a left-leaning discourse that focused on the broader democratic deficit, minority rights and the language of discrimination, the fact that they were foremost a particularist Kurdish party representing the interest of Kurds meant bargaining with the government always remained a possibility. However, with the birth of HDP, the Kurds formally entered into political partnership with Turkish leftist groups who had always maintained an oppositional discourse against the AKP government. Such a partnership secured HDP's natural political trajectory was always going to lead a more radicalized leftist rhetoric. As a Kurdish journalist explained to me,

> After the presidential elections and Kobane protests in the south-east in October, there was a feeling amongst Kurds that this was there moment to voice their demands even louder and with a greater sense of urgency. Suddenly, HDP's project made sense. The marriage between pro-Kurdish activism and Turkish leftism was converging at just the right moment and led to a growing confidence that projecting an oppositional discourse was the correct path to follow (Kurdish journalist, personal interview, 2019).

After Demirtaş's statement of intent against Erdoğan's desired presidential system, the HDP had set themselves up to become a truly leftist party that would act to block any attempt at further authoritarianism by the ruling AKP. Given the success in the presidential election, HDP decided to contest the June 2015 general election as a party, rather than as independents as all pro-Kurdish parties had. This was a significant risk because it relied on the party securing at least 10% of the vote to avoid falling below the threshold.

Another major development in the election campaign was President Erdoğan's open disapproval of the 'Dolmabahçe declaration' which took place between AKP and HDP parliamentarians in February 2015. According to the declaration – which was attended to by the HDP members Pervin Buldan, İdris Baluken and Sırrı Süreyya Önder as well as AKP government ministers Yalçın Akdoğan and Efkan Ala – the HDP delegation conveyed Öcalan's decision to call upon the PKK to hold an extraordinary congress in the Spring to make the 'historical decision to replace armed struggle with democratic politics (Hafiza Merkezi, 2015).' Furthermore, the statement contained ten clauses that would recognize the local dimensions of a democratic solution as well as calling for the development of a pluralist democratic approach with regard to the recognition of identity across Turkey. However, rather than heralding a new phase in the peace process as it had intended to, Erdoğan distanced himself from the agreement on March 22nd when he said he did not approve of it and that there was no Kurdish question (NTV, 2015). In April, as the June elections drew closer, clashes between Turkish Armed Forces and the PKK intensified in the south-east, which put the prospects of peace under further jeopardy. Furthermore, with Demirtaş continuing to criticize the government's ambiguity with regard to the peace process, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stated that Demirtaş was 'lying and distorting the facts… is he the chairperson of a legitimate political party, or a defender of terror who seeks to legitimize this type of terrorist activity carried out by armed elements of separatist terror organisations through pressure and in order to manipulate the people?" (Hafiza Merkezi, 2015).

Such tensions between the ruling AK party and the HDP continued to unravel over the following months. The reasons behind a deterioration in peace talks is contested, with government officials claiming they were blocked by the PKK's hesitance to disarm as well as HDP's critical stance against the government, with Demirtaş himself deemed as particularly obstructive. Whereas, Kurdish spokespersons seemed to blame the ruling AKP for allowing clashes to break out in the south-east, and for the comments made by Erdoğan and other party spokesmen that refused to recognise the Dolmabahçe compromise. On April 28th, Erdoğan confounded matters by stating that claiming there is a Kurdish question is akin to separatism:

> Saying 'There is a Kurdish question' constitutes, from this point on, separatism. The Kurdish question is caused precisely by those who say that there is a Kurdish question. There is no longer a Kurdish question in our country. There is the State in this country. The existence of a table at which we sit facing each other means that the State has collapsed. The State does not lay down its arms, and if a terrorist bears arms, the State does what is necessary. This is why the issue of internal security is sensitive. The HDP resorted to illegal methods to make our work difficult" (Hafiza Merkezi, 2015).

Such rhetoric seemed to set the tone for the upcoming election campaign, with Erdoğan attempting to appeal beyond the Kurdish vote to more nationalist votes. Following Erdoğan's dismissal of the so-called "Kurdish Question", the PKK announced that the process had been ended by the AKP and that they have removed the congress [in which disarmament was to formally be decided] from their agenda as "the PKK would have held it's congress in response to steps taken by the state" (Hafiza Merkezi, 2015). Just two weeks before the elections, Demirtaş formally announced that the process had been frozen due to the isolation imposed on Öcalan with the party delegation prevented from visiting him on İmralı Island.

With the peace process seemingly halted, HDP's positioning during the June election campaign followed much of the discourse used by Demirtaş in the Presidential elections the year before. However, given the faltered peace process, and Demirtaş's promise "Seni başkan yaptırmayacağız" (We shall not make you President), HDP's portrayal as an oppositional party to the ruling AKP had more success in convincing non-Kurds that a vote for HDP would not lead to some form of bargain between the AKP and HDP. In order to succeed in passing the 10% threshold, the party targeted three voting groups which they needed to convince beyond their traditional Kurdish voters who had voted for the predecessor pro-Kurdish parties in the south-east. The first was voters of Kurdish descent who lived in Istanbul's western cities – in particular Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir – having migrated from the south-east; the second group was conservative Kurds who had traditionally backed the AKP since their rise in 2002; lastly, the party targeted secular liberal voters of non-Kurdish or Turkish descent as well as Alevis. In order to achieve such representation, the rebranding of the party as a Türkiyeli party was seen as key in appealing to such an array of groups, but was particularly important in convincing Turkish liberals and secularists.

Much in line with Demirtaş's presidential campaign, HDP's election campaign in June 2015 focused on existing social and political inequalities. They sought to appeal to different identities across Turkey, fielding a list of candidates that included LGBT activists, Alevis such as Turgut Öker (who was the former president of the European Alevi Unions Confederation), as well as Armenian and Assyrian candidates. The slogan throughout the election campaign was 'bizler meclise' ('all of us to parliament') which emphasized a more plural parliamentary representation. However, while the focus of

their campaign outside the Kurdish region was to appeal to the liberal electorate in urban centres, HDP also showed pragmatism by fielding Kurdish conservatives such as one of the founders of AKP, Dengir Mir Mehmet Fırat. Such a tactic clearly paid off, with a number of prominent traditional families who had supported AKP in previous elections announcing that they were switching their allegiance to the HDP (Taraf, 2015).

The election results were a resounding success for HDP, securing 13.1% of the national vote and 80 seats in parliament. This was a significant improvement from the 35 seats BDP secured in the 2011 elections and the 23 DTP had secured in 2007. Not only did HDP manage to comfortable pass the 10% threshold, the election results heralded an end to AKP's parliamentary majority for the first time in 13 years. While AKP had steadily increased their vote in the three elections prior to this election, gaining 34.3%, 46.6% and 49.8% respectively, the June 2015 elections saw the ruling party only retain 40.9% of the national vote. The 258 seats were their poorest election results to date, and showed the declining dominance of the party.

The party performed especially poorly in the south-east, where HDP's strategy of fielding Kurdish conservatives paid off with Kurds who had previously voted for AKP switching their allegiance to the HDP. In total, HDP increased their votes in the Kurdish region from 2.3 to 3.2 million when compared to the 2011 elections, while also substantially increasing their support in Turkey's western metropolises. In 2011, BDP candidates had gained 530,000 votes in the western provinces, but during the 2015 elections, this increased five-fold to 2.8 million votes in total. In Istanbul, where one fifth of the national vote is cast, HDP increased their share from 400,000 to 1 million in total (12.14%) (Yörük, 2018, pp.130-31).

However, the election campaign itself was marred by violence and political polarization. According to data, there were 162 violent attacks on electoral activities of parties, with HDP the target of 123 of such attacks (Kemahlıoğlu, 2015, p.453). The fact that HDP were the victim of the vast majority of such attacks underlined the threat the party was deemed to pose to the status quo, and the election was further tarnished by the bomb attack that took place during HDP's election meeting in Diyarbakir two days prior to the election. 4 people died and at least 100 people were injured in the ISIS-bomb attack.

Considering HDP's failure to secure votes western votes in the 2014 local elections (with Sırrı Süreyya Önder only securing 4.6% in Istanbul), the June 2015 elections represented a major breakthrough for the HDP. Many suggested such an election result vindicated the party's Türkiyelileşme strategy, and served to vindicate the party's antagonism towards President Erdoğan that was key in securing opposition votes from Turkish liberal and Alevi sectors of the electorate. Suddenly, having been defined as a regional party focused on the particularist demands of Kurds, HDP had announced themselves on the national stage and had shifted to an all-country party.

5.3 The breakdown in peace and HDP's fight for survival

Following the election results, with AKP not holding a majority in parliament, a negotiation process began which began to explore the possibility of establishing a coalition government. With MHP, who had also performed particularly well in the elections after gaining 16% of the national vote, ruling out an oppositional coalition

when they announced they would not negotiate with the HDP, CHP alone entered talks

with the government. Such talks lasted one month and produced no results, and AKP

seemed particularly reluctant to enter a power-sharing agreement, with President

Erdoğan himself declaring that entering a coalition government would be political

suicide (Kalaycıoğlu, 2018, p.23).[8] Once the legal timeframe for a government to be

formed following elections had passed (45 days according to Article 116 of the

Constitution), snap elections were called for November 1st, just 5 months after the June

elections (Sayarı, 2016).

In the November 1st elections, AKP regained their majority by gaining 49.5% of

the national vote and 317 seats, while the HDP took 10.76% of the vote and gained 59

seats. Studies have shown that of the 5,173,841 voters that changed their party

preferences between the June and November elections, 4.6 million of them voted for the

AKP in the November elections, while CHP marginally increased their share with

560,000 voting for them. Both HDP and MHP reduced their share of the vote, with HDP

losing just under a million votes (Kalaycıoğlu, 2018, pp.23-25). Such election results

surprised many, with most analysts predicting that the AKP would fail to regain the

parliamentary majority that they craved. Of the 1 million votes HDP lost, many

concluded that a number of conservative Kurds who had switched allegiance from the

AKP to the HDP in the June elections returned to the ruling AKP, although the party

also lost a significant number of 'borrowed votes' to the CHP as well (Çifçi, E-Kurd

Daily, 2015). Studies have shown that many HDP voters either returned to the AKP or

did not show up at the polling stations at all (Radikal, 2015). However, while this may

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[8] President Erdoğan himself declared that entering a coalition government would be political suicide.

have been the case for conservative Kurdish voters, traditional supporters of the Kurdish movement continued to support the HDP. In Şirnak, where some of worst fighting took place prior to the November election, HDP raised their vote in the November polls. Thus, while HDP continued to appeal to traditional supporters of the Kurdish movement, the party undoubtedly lost the support of conservative and middle class Kurds as well as liberal supporters in Turkey's western provinces.

However, a number of factors help explain AKP's improved performance in the November election. While there had been a number of violent incidents during the June election campaign (culminating in the Diyarbakir bombing), political stability was broadly preserved. During the period between the June and November polls, as a result of the breakdown of peace, 453 PKK militants, 167 security forces and 242 civilians had lost their lives (Sözcü, 2015).

The Kurdish peace process broke down when PKK militants killed 2 policemen in the border town of Ceylanpınar on July 22nd (Al Jazeera 2015). The PKK themselves had claimed that the attack was 'revenge murder' for the ISIS bomb that killed 35 pro-Kurdish activists in Suruç on July 20th (Al Jazeera, 2015). Lastly, with less than a month before the November elections, another ISIS twin suicide bomb killed more than 100 HDP activists at a party rally in Ankara. Such incidents threatened the stability of the country, and as Ersin Kalaycıoğlu's research has shown, the electorate's concerns between June and November shifted from the economic slowdown to worries regarding national security and terror:

> The majority of the voters seemed to have become increasingly concerned with their own personal and political security of the country as the terror attacks began

to surge… [and] the increasing insecurity seemed to have pushed the voters to welcome a strong party government, and the only possible option seemed to be on the offer by the AKP… as the performance of the MHP leadership, HDP and CHP began to look more and more problematic in the eyes of the people, it seemed as if more of them began to see party government by the AKP as the more feasible and even desirable option… [thus] concerns over the upsurge in terror attacks by the PKK and the related concerns over national security, as more and more people seemed to have perceived an emerging Kurdish nationalist fervour to the south of Turkey, (in Iraq and Syria), which seemed to be spilling over to Turkey, seemed to have rallied around the AKP flag to establish a party government (Kalaycıoğlu, 2018, pp.32-35).

Furthermore, the bomb attacks against HDP did not prove beneficial to the party in the November elections. The July Suruç bombing targeted pro-Kurdish youths who were preparing to cross into the Kurdish town of Kobane to offer humanitarian aid to a city that had become a symbol of Kurdish resistance against ISIS. Likewise, the Ankara twin bomb attack on October 10th, the bloodiest terror attack in Turkey's history, was also linked to ISIS. Despite HDP claims that the government bears some responsibility for its negligence, public opinion tended to back the government's call for stability and strong rule. In fact, the majority of AKP and MHP voters believed the PKK or HDP were the most likely culprits of the Ankara bomb (Akkoyunlu, 2015). Thus, the effect of such bombings only polarized the country further and strengthened the appeal to return to a strong AKP government that could guarantee stability. Moreover, as Grigoriadis has argued, the government's accusation that HDP was nothing more than an accomplice for the PKK resonated with the Turkish public:

As the Kurdish peace process stumbled and hostilities between Turkish security and the PKK forces recurred, the AKP and pro-government media persistently accused the HDP of being an accomplice, if not a puppet, of a terrorist organization. Despite repeated statements by Demirtaş that aimed to clearly differentiate the HDP and the PKK… the HDP appeared unable to convincingly distinguish itself from the PKK and terrorist violence… Scaling up the rhetoric against the HDP and identifying it with the PKK found resonance with a substantial part of Turkish public opinion, which was ambivalent in its stance vis-à-vis the HDP. Raising the spectre of military confrontation also made it

more difficult for members of the Turkish secular middle class to vote for a party which in the eyes of many was still identified with Kurdish nationalism and secessionism (Grigoriadis, 2016, pp.43-44).

Thus, the June and November elections told two tales. In June, the AKP had lost the majority for the first time, and appeared to herald a new era of pluralist Turkish politics. Considering that much of AKP's June election campaign centred on changing the Constitution towards a Presidential system, the poll was a clear rejection of President Erdoğan's long-held desire to consolidate power. However, less than 5 months later, the picture was entirely different with the electorate prioritizing centralized power and strong government over a more pluralist, power-sharing form of governance.

At the time, HDP's strategy of Türkiyelileşme was very much debated. While the June results vindicated HDP's strategy, with the party propelled onto a national stage, the November polls exposed the inherent contradictions at the heart of the strategy. The PKK's eagerness to reignite the conflict in the summer of 2015 was interpreted as an unwillingness to give up leadership of the movement to a youthful, idealist leader in Selahattin Demirtaş. While the HDP leadership tried to separate themselves from the PKK leadership, this was not the case throughout the party and the clashes highlighted the civil-military tensions within the movement. While Türkiyelileşme was not considered dead, with HDP still managing to retain a sizeable portion of their vote, it was clear that HDP needed to overcome such contradictions and reclaim and advocate for a more inclusive, pluralistic politics (Akkoyunlu, 2015).

In Chapter 6, I analyse HDP's position regarding the declaration of democratic autonomy and the urban clashes in the south-east, but the party's popularity was undoubtedly diminished by the contradictions and fundamental tension between one

element of the movement being actively engaged in armed conflict while the party claims to be a peacemaker. Between August 2015 and July 2016, 85 curfews were declared in 33 Kurdish districts across the south-east, with International Crisis Group claiming more than 1,700 people lost their lives during this period (International Crisis Group, 2016). Of these casualties, more than 300 were civilians. The clashes and ensuing crackdown did not just target militants – over the same period, more than 10,000 people linked with the HDP were taken into custody, with 3,387 formally arrested (Deutsche Welle, 2016).

While the crackdown on HDP continued, the PKK continued inflaming tensions with a series of bomb attacks across Turkey. In February 2016, a car bomb suicide attack killed 28 personnel working at the military headquarters in Ankara; a month later, on March 13th 2016, 37 people were killed in Ankara's Güvenpark; 12 more people lost their lives as a result of a PKK car bomb in Istanbul's Vezneciler district (Stockholm Centre for Freedom, 2018). Such a dynamic further polarized the nation, with many concluding that PKK's violent strategies undermined HDP's attempts to instil a more pluralistic form of politics. In March 2016, the AKP announced it was submitting a motion seeking to lift parliamentary immunity on MPs with criminal cases pending, which effectively targeted HDP lawmakers. Prior to such an announcement, President Erdoğan had signalled his intention of targeting HDP MPs: "They [HDP lawmakers] must pay a price. We need to assess the investigations that have been launched by the chief prosecutor's offices in Ankara and Diyarbakır from this perspective. I believe that stripping them of their immunity would be a starting point for us to have a positive

impact on the counterterrorism [operations] in our country. They [HDP lawmakers] have more than 160 [criminal] cases pending against them in Parliament" (Evrensel, 2016).

The amendment was eventually passed on May 20th 2016, with CHP and MHP supporting the motion. In the lead up to the vote, significant pressure was put on CHP to support the motion as the party fearing that not supporting it would lead to accusations of supporting terrorism. Prior to the vote, protestors threw eggs at CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu while he was attending a funeral of a Turkish soldier (Al Jazeera Türkiye, 2016), underlining the tensions and polarized discourse dominating Turkey at the time.

On November 4th 2016, 12 HDP deputies were arrested, including co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ. Demirtaş described such developments as a civilian coup against the HDP. To date, 13 HDP lawmakers remain in jail after more than 18 months on terrorism charges. The charges levelled against Demirtaş vary, including insulting the Turkish nation, disseminating propaganda on the behalf of the PKK, defaming the military and insulting the President.

On July 15th 2016, a failed military coup took place led by a group of officers associated with the Gulen movement. The crackdown was severe even by Turkey's standards. In total, nearly 160,000 civil servants lost their job and some 60,000 people were formally arrested (Stockholm Centre for Freedom, 2018). Furthermore, the government closed down more than 100 media outlets in the ensuing state of emergency that was declared immediately following the coup attempt. The crackdown on media outlets disproportionally targeted Kurdish affiliated outlets like Özgür Gündem newspaper.

Alongside the crackdown on party members and deputies, the AKP made moves to weaken HDP's control of south-eastern municipalities with the instalment of the kayyum following the coup attempt. On September 1st 2016, a government decree permitted the takeover of municipalities suspected of supporting terrorism. The government declared such a policy was necessary due to the violence, and accused the HDP-run municipalities of lending support to the militants with municipal diggers used to build defences. In total, the kayyum policy replaced 95 HDP-run municipalities and arrested more than 100 mayors.

The two-fold state crackdown on HDP-run municipalities and stripping the immunity of parliamentarians greatly weakened HDP's ability to function as a party, along with the sheer scale of arrest against party members. The lifting of parliamentary immunity was reminiscent of the 1994 decision to lift the immunity on DEP members Leyla Zana, Orhan Doğan, Hatip Dicle, and Selim Sadak which led to them languishing in jail for 10 years. However, the kayyum policy signalled an entirely new form of pressure on the party, and represented the first time that the state had targeted local representation of a pro-Kurdish party. For many municipalities across the south-east, the instalment of the kayyum meant local Kurds did not have pro-Kurdish representation for the first time since 1999. In the 1999 local elections, HADEP secured local representation in the majority of Kurdish-majority regions in the south-east, and despite the emergence of new pro-Kurdish parties in the following years, Kurdish representation remained.

As a result of the oppression against the party, the HDP entered a period of structural crisis. As one HDP Kurdish deputy explained, HDP's political discourse was

very much shaped by the peace process, so when it ended, the shifting political climate disorientated the party. As HDP tried to find a balance that focused on the need for peace and pluralism, the actions of the PKK militants and the state seemed to drown out HDP voices. Furthermore, the sheer scale of arrests immobilized the party:

> Until the arrests began, as a party we had been on the front foot, promoting a whole new political discourse and in this way we took the state by surprise. The state didn't know how to respond, as AKP had been used to setting the political agenda until this point. So the state responded in the way it knows best, through mass arrests and severe crackdown on our ability to organize. This was unbelievably disorientating, and we entered a period of crisis as we negotiated a transition from a party proposing a whole new progressive discourse to a party of victimhood. Our language shifted too: rather than discussing our political project, we occupied ourselves with discussing the scale of the oppression and victimization against us (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018).

Although such a shift had a dramatic effect on the party's ability to propose fresh discourse, the HDP broadly stuck to their principles. The crackdown on media outlets meant HDP were getting less attention nationally, but the measured carried out by the state failed to fundamentally shift HDP's narrative and party program. One HDP MP argues that the aim of such a crackdown was to break the political will of HDP:

> We had dozens of meetings during this so-called crisis period, all aimed at adapting to the changing political circumstances. The key strategy that emerged was that as a party we must not change our political program or fundamental processes, as this is exactly what the state wanted. Both in parliament and in our constituencies, we held our political ground and terrain. The major component of the state's crackdown was to break HDP's political will, to force us to surrender on certain issues. But the state definitely failed in this sense – we process has been costly for us, with so many members behind bars, but there is no change in our political attitude. They may beat us up on a daily basis, but that does not mean we're wrong. This in itself is what politics is: to defend your ground despite all the pressures (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018).

Over the last 3 years, HDP have clearly suffered from the crackdown imposed on their party. The synergy they created by allying themselves with progressive forces against Turkey was deemed as a threat to the state apparatus, and in HDP's eyes, such forces

worked to try and break the 'political will' of the party. However, while such state oppression against the party has hardened the Turkish public's view that the party is a threat to national security and associate it with Kurdish terrorism, the state failed to break up HDP's broad-based alliance with the Turkish left. To date, HDP continues to be a party for progressive voices across the non-Kurdish electorate. Chapter 6 examines the ideology that binds the various constituent forces within the party – democratic autonomy – before discussing the relationship between the different groups – from the Kurdish nationalists to the Turkish left – in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 6

DEMOCRACY AND DEMCRATIC AUTONOMY:

HOW HDP DIFFERS FROM PREVIOUS PRO-KURDISH PARTIES

Having analysed the trajectory of legal pro-Kurdish parties in Turkey, it is clear that the period can be summarized into two distinct blocks. During HEP and DEP's entrance into the political system during 1990-94, Kurdish deputies actively tried to portray themselves as a 'party of Turkey'. However, the accusations that were levelled against them led to a clear radicalisation on the part of the politicians. This is exemplified by Leyla Zana's provocative decision to speak Kurdish during the parliamentary oath, as well as DEP's decision to boycott elections in the face of intimidation against the party. Thus, rather than resisting media and politicians portrayal of HEP/DEP as a party of 'terrorism' and 'betrayal', Kurdish party activists chose a path of radicalisation which only cemented the state perspective that they were not legitimate for Turkey's parliament.

Following this, pro-Kurdish parties entered a significant period outside parliament, in which they cemented their support base and became more regional in character. By the time they re-entered parliament as DTP deputies in 2007, the pro-Kurdish parties had become thoroughly institutionalised parties through their experience of running municipalities across the south-east. Such an experience gave Kurdish deputies a certain maturity when it came to renewed attempts by the state to paint them as illegitimate representatives of parliament, and as a result, state coercion did not lead to the same levels of radicalisation that HEP/DEP exhibited. Over time, pro-Kurdish

deputies benefited from this as they become more thoroughly engrained into Turkey's political landscape with the establishment of HDP. Likewise, following HDP's success in 2014-15 in portraying themselves as a Türkiyeli party, the state once more resorted to pressure as a means to marginalise the party from Turkish political life.

While previous chapters have provided the historical development of pro-Kurdish parties, and the mainstream reaction from the state in trying to delegitimise such voices, this chapter focuses more on the party literature as well as political speeches by pro-Kurdish deputies to understand the shifting discourse in relation to democracy. Throughout, I seek to explore whether we can determine whether HDP have been influenced by HEP's democratic discourse, or whether the PKK's discursive transition should be considered the primary influence of the party. The chapter can be divided into two sections: the first sub-chapter compares the democratic discourse as articulated by the HEP and HDP to understand the linkage and influence the former had on the later; the second sub-chapter examines the emergence of democratic autonomy and its utilization by Kurdish militants after the peace process broke down. In this sub-chapter I argue that the militants' decision to declare democratic autonomy contained an ethnic dimension to it which challenges the civic understanding of identity that Türkiyelileşme has attempted to construct.

6.1 A developing democratic discourse from HEP to HDP

When HEP was established in 1990, the ability to voice openly pro-Kurdish demands was severely restricted by the 1982 constitution that strictly banned any mention of the

existence of Kurds. Given such limitations, much of HEP's political program focused on advocating a pluralist and participatory conception of democracy, which they argued couldn't be achieved without comprehensive reforms to the constitutional framework, which had been drafted during military rule and gave the military-dominated National Security Council (MGK: Milli Güvenlik Kurulu) much power. Due to this, HEP proposed abolishing the MGK and replacing the constitution with a civilian constitution that would place clear limitations on state power to prevent the prevalent authoritarianism which they argued characterised Turkey at the time.

With regard to the Kurdish Question, the 1990 HEP Party Program argued that such an issue had to be resolved within the context of the need for democratization of the state and society. In fact, the party argued that democracy couldn't be fully developed in Turkey without a political, democratic solution to the Kurdish conflict:

> The party accepts that the main component of the establishment of an effective democracy in the country is through a solution to the Kurdish question… The party aims for a solution to the Kurdish question through democratic and peaceful methods according to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Helsinki Document. A peaceful and democratic solution will benefit every section of our society, and can only be developed in an environment where everyone can free participate (HEP, 1990).

This idea that the unresolved Kurdish question was acting as a barrier against further democratization of state and society is something which continued to be advocated by the Kurdish movement to this day, including within the HDP. In their 2018 manifesto, the party links the Kurdish question to democracy when it states "the solution to the issue of democracy [in Turkey] is the solution to the Kurdish question. Peace, not just with regard to the clashes, deaths and pain, but also with regard to virtue, is the biggest

step towards co-existence" (HDP Seçim Bildirgesi, 2018, p.9).[9] Likewise, in HDP's

2015 manifesto, the party placed the Kurdish issue within the struggle for further

democratization: "Until all the issues of democracy in Turkey are solved, especially with

regard to the Kurdish question, we will continue our principled and resolute stance

(HDP Seçim Bildirgesi, 2015, p.13)."[10] Furthermore, rather than pressing the need for a

solution to the conflict for an improvement in Kurdish rights, the HDP focus on the

importance of the peace process for all the different identities and cultures of the

country: "HDP will work towards ensuring a lasting peace and our future by creating a

constitutional guarantee for all the different identities and cultures living together. The

solution process [to the Kurdish conflict] will defend all the people of our geography

and the will of coexistence until the end (HDP Seçim Bildirgesi, 2015.p.12)".[11]

Thus, within HDP's own party program, we see a continuation of what HEP and

other pro-Kurdish parties advocated throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Democracy

remained a central characteristic of all party programs, with special attention given to

the need to democratize both the state and society. Much like HEP, HDP proposed

introducing a more democratic constitution that would act as the legal basis for a

democratization process. The proposed democratic constitution would contain (HDP

Seçim Bildirgesi, 2015):

- A social contract that recognizes and secures the needs of the various identities,
  cultures, beliefs and languages of Turkey.

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[9] 'Kürt sorununun çözümü, demokrasi sorununun çözümüdür. Barış, sadece çatışmaların, ölümlerin ve acıların olmaması değil, aynı zamanda erdeme, iyiliğe, bir arada yaşama doğru atılan en büyük adım olacaktır' in Halkların Demokrasi Partisi (HDP), 2018 Seçim Bildirgesi p.9
[10] 'Bu ilkeli ve kararlı tutum, başta Kürt sorunu olmak üzere, Türkiye'deki tüm demokrasi sorunları çözülene kadar devam edecek.' See HDP, *Büyük İnsanlık*, 2015 Seçim Bildirgesi (2015), pp. 13.
[11] 'HDP, bütün halkların farklı kimlik ve kültürleriyle, anayasal güvence altında birlikte yaşaması, geleceğimizin ve kalıcı barışımızın sağlanması için çalışacak. Coğrafyamızdaki bütün halkların, çözüm süreci ekseninde daha da belirginleştirdiği birlikte yaşama iradesini sonuna kadar savunacak', Ibid, p.12.

- The constitution would give strength to equality, sexual liberation, and social, ecological and democratic principles that would be a foundation for people's right to equal citizenship.
- The HDP openly opposed the proposed Presidential system, and the constitution would resolve to never allow the implementation of such a system
- The constitution would ensure every citizen has the right to peace, justice, and a fair trial, social security, education, housing, disability rights, as well as the right to conscientious objection, fair trial, animal and environmental rights and guarantee a free press among others (HDP Seçim Bildirgesi, June 2015).

A number of other notable policies included removing the 10% threshold for political parties needed to enter parliament (something which has damaged pro-Kurdish parliamentary representation in the past), environmental and ecological policies that would encourage the development of more urban green spaces across Turkey, as well as a free press as the basis of a functioning democracy. Thus, we can see that HDP's party policies placed great emphasis on instilling a more democratic constitution that would help the country to becoming more democratic with human rights as the foundation of this.

Much like HEP's stance, HDP linked the Kurdish issue to the need for a more thoroughly democratic state, secured via a democratic constitution, and thus we can see that throughout the various pro-Kurdish parties that have existed since 1990, there is a continuity to the way the Kurdish issue has been framed. Rather than drawing on more nationalist discourses that tend to focus on statelessness of Kurds, HDP and its predecessor parties avoid such statements and frame the Kurdish issue as a fundamental democratic struggle. Once again we can clearly see how HEP's political platform became a blueprint for its successor parties. By framing the solution to the Kurdish question within the broader struggle for greater democracy, the pro-Kurdish parties

transformed the particularist issue of a peace process for Kurds into a more universalist demand for democracy.

HEP's democratic demands aimed to encourage and emphasize a discourse that would lead to political reconciliation to end the conflict. In order to achieve this, HEP advocated a more democratically-free environment whereby open dialogue would be encouraged to discuss the Kurdish question more broadly. The party gave particular importance on the need to end a number of undemocratic practices in order to achieve a freer environment. In particular, the party emphasized the need to end the practice of emergency rule and torture in the south-east, abolishing the death penalty, and lifting various legal restrictions on discussions surrounding Kurdish identity and demands (HEP, 1990).

While HDP devotes much time to discussing the need to produce a democratically-free environment, the emphasis is less on the lack of democracy in the south-east, and instead focuses on the benefit a democratic environment would create for the whole of the country. Much like its statements that a solution to the Kurdish question would benefit all the different cultures and identities in Turkey, the emphasis of HDP is more fully on Turkey in its entirety. While HEP talks about the need to lift restrictions on speaking Kurdish, HDP instead calls for a social contract that will protect the cultures and languages of Turkey. Furthermore, HDP incorporates a wider struggle, such as animal and environmental rights, as they attempt to incorporate and unite the various struggles of the country within the party. Likewise, HDP draws attention to the concept of a 'democratic republic', and focuses on the coexistence of people more broadly: "Until today, despite the systematic state policy's discourse that attempts to separate

people from one another, they have not prevented people from living together. Such a historical foundation of coexistence and equality would form the basis of the democratic republic and the struggle for unity" (HDP Seçim Bildirgesi, 2015).[12]

Since the establishment of HEP, all the legal pro-Kurdish parties have placed special emphasis on the democratic deficit in Turkey and have sought to campaign for Kurdish rights through demands for improved democracy. To a certain extent, framing the conflict in this way could be interpreted as an attempt by party activists and deputies to avoid accusations of treason or attempting to divide Turkey, and thus not a genuine call for democratic principles to be observed. However, the continuity of their argument since 1990 until now suggests that all the pro-Kurdish parties had a genuine commitment in campaigning for a more democratic nation. Moreover, by advocating for a thorough democratization package which they firmly believed would help solve the long-standing Kurdish conflict, all the parties that followed HEP hoped that, by campaigning on a broad democratic platform, they could gain allies from outside their traditional Kurdish base.

However, while HEP's platform with regard to democracy and the Kurdish question remained a blueprint for its successor parties, the language and emphasis of HDP shows a subtle development from HEP's more restrictive focus on need for democracy to improve Kurdish rights. While HEP's party program references how a solution to the Kurdish conflict will benefit everybody in Turkey, the party tends not to

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[12] 'Günümüze gelene kadar sistemli bir devlet politikası olarak, halkların birbirlerine uzaklığı üzerine örülen ilişkiler ve söylemler, halklarımızın bir arada yaşamasını engelleyememiştir. Tarihi dayanakları olan halkların birlikte ve eşit yaşamı, demokratik cumhuriyetin temel dayanağını ve üzerine birlikteliğimizi inşa edeceğimiz esası oluşturur' in HDP, *Büyük İnsanlık*, 2015 Seçim Bildirgesi (2015), p. 12.

emphasize the plurality of identities and how they would benefit from a solution to the conflict. In contrast, the HDP places greater emphasis on the different identities and cultures across Turkey, and argues that the peace process will be beneficial to the multiple identities of Turkey. Gone is HEP's language of 'oppression' to describe the Kurds exclusively; instead, HDP opt for a more inclusive understanding of oppression as inflicted on variety of identities and subjectivities in Turkey as a whole. While such a distinction is subtle, it shows how HDP's political platform was more thoroughly focused on a Türkiyelileşme agenda in that it moves beyond a dichotomy between Kurds and the Turkish state towards a more pluralist agenda that challenges the homogenising nature of the Turkish state inflicted upon the 'peoples of Turkey'. Such a distinction brings to mind what the former co-chair said to me with regard to the difference between HDP and previous pro-Kurdish parties:

> While HDP carries the heritage of the pro-Kurdish parties, it is not simply a carbon copy in that HDP is designed for introducing Turkey to a political program that encompasses the Kurdish problem as part of the wider issue of Turkey's democratic structure. Turkey needs a democratization program, and the core of HDP's political program is a proposal for democratic autonomy and a democratic republic that is based on democratic autonomous regions and provinces. This is HDP's major political proposal, and this is different from the previous pro-Kurdish parties in that it makes HDP an all-Turkey party at its core, of which the Kurdish momentum is just one part of. This is a delicate balance, but in many ways the previous pro-Kurdish parties were particularist parties with generalised perspectives; while HDP is a party based on all-Turkey transformation, but with particular attention to local issues including the Kurds (HDP former co-chair, personal interview, 2018).

The concept that while HEP and many of its successor parties were particularist parties which had generalised perspectives fits the narrative with which HEP discuss the Kurdish issue and need for further democratization. HEP's language focuses on how the failure to find a resolution to the Kurdish conflict has acted as a barrier for further

democratization, but when it sights undemocratic practises of the state, it exclusively refers to incidents that are prevalent in the south-east. In this, the party used the universalist value of the need for democracy, but just as a means to advocate for an improvement of Kurdish rights. Whereas, HDP avoids restricting its language exclusively to Kurdish rights, but instead emphasises the need for democracy across Turkey for its entire people. Their focus on localised democracy and autonomy undoubtedly leads to much discussion on the Kurdish solution, but the party appears to place great effort on not restricting the debate to Kurdish rights alone.

While DEP, HEDAP and DEHAP broadly followed a similar discourse to the HEP, a significant shift began to emerge with DTP from 2005 when the party began to voice more specific demands of democratic autonomy. Such a concept attempted to transform the debate surrounding democracy in Turkey towards a form of federalism. The timing of such an ideological repositioning of the pro-Kurdish parties was mainly due to the ideological shifts that had taken place after years of soul-searching within the PKK itself after the arrest of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. Until Öcalan's arrest, the party had a Leninist organizational structure whose vanguard pursued a systematic use of revolutionary violence in order to provoke increased state oppression. Such state oppression, the PKK hoped, would help create a national and revolutionary consciousness among the Kurdish masses. This revolutionary liberation discourse – with its Stalinist personality cult around Öcalan, and the side-lining or elimination of party

dissidents[13] – aimed to construct an independent, socialist Kurdistan through a prolonged liberation war.

However, after Öcalan's arrest, the party entered a period of repositioning the militant Kurdish organisation from a revolutionary discourse towards a democratic discourse. In the 1990s, the PKK had shown signs that they were beginning to move away from the national liberation discourse, which had lost much of its appeal following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The most symbolic act was the removal of the hammer and sickle from the PKK's party flag in 1995, but various interviews also indicated a changing ideology. In Doğu Perincek's book, *Abdullah Öcalan ile Görüşme* (A meeting with Abdullah Öcalan), the PKK leader suggested that peace could be achieved if a treaty ensured equality for Turkey's Kurds (Perincek, 1990, 87-91). Likewise, in an interview with journalist Oral Çalışlar in 1993, Öcalan had said that independence could be achieved in a single state, and he thereby attempted to dissociate his goal of some form of independence from separatism as such: "Instead of separation, I give more importance to terms such as "independence", freedom" and "union based on equality". People can be independent within the same state." (Oral Çalışlar, *Öcalan ve Burkayla Kürt Sorunu*, 1993, p.17-8; Also see Güneş, p. 127-28).

However, despite such statements, it was not until the 2000s that PKK's broader goals became fully defined within a democratic discourse. During Öcalan's trial in 1999, the PKK leader formally announced his ideas for a 'democratic union':

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[13] For the elimination of party dissidents, see the book by PKK veteran turned dissident: Çürükkaya, Selim. 1996. *Apo'nun ayetleri/Beyrut Günlügü* (Apo's Verses/Beirut Diary), Istanbul: Doz Yayınları

The historical conclusion I have arrived at is that the solution for this [Kurdish] problem which has grown so big, is [a] *democratic union* with the *democratic, secular Republic...* The interests of Kurds lie in the democratic unity of Turkey and is the only alternative in solving the Kurdish question. Separation is neither possible nor necessary (Gunter, 2000, p.852).

Furthermore, in the PKK Congresses that followed Öcalan's arrest, the PKK restructured their organisation in line with Öcalan's project for a democratic republic. In the 2003 Congress, the PKK declared the establishment of the Kongra-Gel, the People's Congress of Kurdistan. As Öcalan described, "the People's Congress of Kurdistan can envisage a peaceful solution for the Kurdish question on the basis of a democratic politics within the existing nation-states" (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2011, p.149). Such developments were an attempt by Öcalan to assure Turkey and other nations that the Kurdish question could be solved through a process of democratisation and did not necessary mean some form of state partition as the PKK had previously demanded. It also pointed towards a shift towards an attempt to conduct democratic politics through civil organisations within the existing political framework of Turkey. As discussed in earlier chapters, the establishment of KCK was one such example of the PKK attempting to play a more prominent role in the civic field of politics in Turkey. Öcalan's wholesale rejection of a nation state initially alienated many Kurdish circles, but over time it gained traction as Öcalan elaborated his argument that liberation cannot be achieved through state-building, but rather through the deepening of democracy (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2011, p.152).

Such organisational changes, as well as the ideological repositioning, on the part of Öcalan clearly had an effect on the pro-Kurdish legal parties in Turkish politics. During the 1990s, while members of the parties sometimes gave statements in favour of

the PKK (especially during DEP's period), Öcalan and the PKK had never made a concerted attempt to interfere with civil politics in Ankara. Furthermore, their goal of full independence through a liberation war meant that both the methods and absolute goals of the early pro-Kurdish legal parties and the PKK were not aligned. However, the reorganisation of the PKK in line with Öcalan's stated project of a 'democratic republic' in the 2000s meant the PKK hoped to influence legal politics more directly and became more aligned with the pro-Kurdish parties such as DEHAP and DTP. As the PKK's realignment led to a convergence in regard to stated goals between the PKK and the legal pro-Kurdish parties, this also led to many Turkish commentators stating that the legal parties were simply political fronts for the PKK. In many ways, the ideological convergence of the two political entities (PKK and legal pro-Kurdish parties') is best epitomised by the development of democratic autonomy, which was first proposed by Öcalan, but over time became more influential within the pro-Kurdish parties own democratic discourse.

However, while such an emerging discourse certainly influenced the legal pro-Kurdish parties, it tends to be overplayed and downplays the influence pro-Kurdish parties engaging in Ankara had on the militant organisation. The inroads that HEP made in the 1990s, as well as the success HADEP had in building a institutional foothold in the south-east from 1999 onwards, had a profound effect on how Kurdish politics was perceived in Turkey. When the PKK formed in the 1970s, and following the military coup in 1980, the political environment was entirely different in that an overtly pro-Kurdish party was deemed as impossible. However, the success of pro-Kurdish legal parties would not have been lost on the PKK, and their transformation to a more direct

engagement with the democratic path to effecting change would have been influenced by the generation of Kurdish activists who sought to use legal avenues to affect change. Thus, while democratic autonomy should be seen as an important influence on HDP, it is also important to emphasise the significance that Kurdish activists in Ankara had on the Kurdish movement as a whole.

6.2 The emergence of democratic autonomy

Öcalan first declared his shift towards democratic autonomy in his 2005 pamphlet 'declaration of democratic confederalism', which rejected the nation-state model as 'out-dated' and instead recommended a bottom-up self-organizational structure through local communes or councils. This was shortly followed by the establishment of KCK, which pointed towards evidence of the PKK's growing *sivil görünümlü* (civil outlook). In Öcalan's 'Road Map' published in 2011, the incarcerated PKK leader compares the KCK to the European Union, and claims the organisation is ultimately aiming to democratize civil society and identifying it as the key to the democratic solution. The newly-founded organisation organised a number of 'free citizen councils', which were used to arbitrate on in domestic cases such as divorces, domestic violence, blood feuds, and honour killings.[14] In 2007, the *Demokratik Toplum Kongresi* (Democratic Society Congress, DTK) was established, although it was not until 2011 that they held their first congress in which they declared their stated goal of democratic autonomy (Milliyet, 2011).

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[14] For an interesting, albeit uncritical, account of these councils, see Kurdistan, Tatort. 2016. *Democratic autonomy in North Kurdistan: The council movement, gender liberation, and ecology*.

The first signs that Öcalan's shift to a democratic discourse influenced pro-Kurdish politicians in Turkey can be traced in DTP's document, 'the Project for Democratic Autonomy', which was in line with Öcalan's concept of democratic confederalism. The project, which was introduced during DTP's second Congress in November 2007 and became official party policy thereafter. A year later, in 2008, the DTP submitted the Project to the Turkish parliament as a solution to the Kurdish conflict, which caused an uproar from all the other parties who accused DTP of proposing a federal system that was akin to separatism.

The document, which aimed to provide a blueprint solution to the Kurdish question, focused on reforming Turkey's administrative system towards a decentralised model of government as well as changing the strict ethnic-based identity that is prevalent in Turkey's discourse on citizenship. Specifically, the document proposed establishing 20-25 regional assemblies across the country which would act as decentralised models of government and would govern on everything from education, health and social services. The central government would remain responsible for foreign affairs, finance and defence, but the regional assemblies would essentially decentralise power to the specific regions. However, while these regional assemblies were clearly influenced by Kurdish aspirations to decentralise power away from the Turkish state's centralised model of governance, the DTP project was careful not to demand regional autonomy based on ethnicity. As the document states,

> … rather than a purely "ethnic" and "territorial" conception of autonomy, democratic autonomy defends a regional and local structure through which cultural differences are able to freely express themselves. Observance with the "Flag" and "Official Language" are binding for the whole territory; yet, democratic autonomy also envisages the establishment of democratic self-

governance by each region and autonomous unit with their own colours and symbols. This structure does not denote federalism or autonomy based on ethnicity; rather it is an administrative consolidation situated between the central government and provinces that takes participatory democracy as its basis (DTP, 2008).

Between the period of 2011 and 2015, the project of democratic autonomy was carried out locally across the south-east by pro-Kurdish entities that were established to develop the ideological concept. Neighbourhood councils were set up which used the ideology of democratic autonomy to arbitrate on local matters across the south-east. But as Michael Leezenberg argues, much of the projects activities underpinned the contradiction of espousing ideals of bottom-up decision making and ideology production while the activities exclusively focused and circulated the ideas and proposals of Abdullah Öcalan:

> These institutions appear to aim less at providing general education and critical thinking, but more at instilling PKK orthodoxy of the ideas [of Abdullah Öcalan] surrounding democratic autonomy or confederalism … These groups [legal and illegal groups that were tasked with spreading democratic autonomy] reflected a clear desire on the PKK's part to dominate or monopolize all organized and institutionalized structures. Few if any non-PKK-affiliated societal groups or political parties are known to have been included in these efforts (Leezenberg, 2016, pp.679-80).

While grassroots organisations continued to instil Öcalan's ideas on democratic autonomy throughout these years, following the breakdown of the peace process and the hendek savaşı that followed, the Kurdish youth that dug trenches and declared self-governance did so within the framework of 'legitimate self-defence' in the context of democratic autonomy. In this, the PKK-aligned YDG-H (often considered a 'youth wing' of the organisation) that dug trenches in towns such as Cizre, Silopi, Sur and Nusaybin interpreted democratic autonomy and confederalism within the context of a militarized context of 'self-defence.' However, while many involved in digging trenches interpreted Öcalan's concept of self-defence as a form of military self-defence, the PKK

leader saw it as much as a political process rather than a purely militaristic strategy.

Defining the nation-state as a 'militarily structured entity', Öcalan argued that such state

militarization could be challenged through self-defence which would help societies

within nation-states in developing democratic decision-making processes. "Therefore,

the self-defence of a society is not limited to the military dimension alone. It also

presupposes the preservation of its identity, its own political awareness, and a process of

democratization (Öcalan, 2011)". However, while Öcalan clearly stated that such a term

also included non-military interpretations such as identity preservation and

democratization, Leezenberg points out the ambiguity in his own terminology which led

Kurdish youths to interpret it as a solely militaristic form of defence:

> Another ambiguous term in Öcalan's writings on democratic confederalism is
> that of 'legitimate self-defence'. In his own words, this self-defence involves
> democratization, political awareness and the preservation of one's identity at
> least as much as a military capacity; but it proved tempting for some followers to
> focus on the armed dimension. Those who wished to could read democratic
> autonomy as a goal to be reached through peaceful, and in particular electoral,
> means and this appears to be the reading followed by HDP politicians. But one
> could equally well read the concept of self-defence it involves as legitimizing
> armed insurgency. This ambivalence was to have fateful consequences
> (Leezenberg, 2016, p.678).

Thus much of the violence that consumed the region following the breakdown in the

peace process in 2015 rests on differing interpretations of the same concept espoused by

Abdullah Öcalan. While radical Kurdish youths interpreted it in terms of an armed

insurrection against the state, HDP politicians themselves interpreted it as an attempt to

achieve a peaceful solution through a strengthening of local democracy. In the June

2015 HDP manifesto, the party dedicated two pages to defining democratic autonomy as

a decentralized model to counter the centralism that defines Turkey's political system.

They placed emphasis on how such a model would 'replace state-appointed governors

with locally-elected ones', thereby challenging the governorship system in Turkey which gives vastly superior power to the Ankara-appointed administrator over the elected mayor. Like the early development of democratic autonomy before the breakdown in violence, the manifesto also pointed towards the system of neighbourhood councils/communes, with superseding assemblies (women, youth and ecology) that would allow all people to locally participate in democratic decision-making. Lastly, the party pointed out the necessity of democratic autonomy in paving the way for a more pluralist form of politics (with an emphasis on the protection of local languages and cultures), a wholesale democratization of the country, and finding a solution to the Kurdish conflict (HDP, 2015). Thus, while Kurdish militants chose to interpret democratic autonomy as a form of militaristic self-defence, HDP themselves saw it as a form of governance that would empower local representation and pave the way for a more pluralist, democratic form of politics.

However, instead of developing the debate surrounding democratic autonomy, the interruption of the hendek politikisa from the summer of 2015 onwards transformed the country's understanding of the project. HDP's interpretation of democratic autonomy as a system of decentralized governance that would empower local administrations was silenced, and instead became associated with YDG-H's concept of legitimate self-defence that was their justification for the armed uprising that consumed the south-east. HDP's reaction to such a development was ambiguous at best. While Demirtaş had originally called for the PKK to lay down their arms and refrain from escalating the situation, the party also spent much time criticizing security forces or their heavy handed response to the conflict. In September 2015, Demirtaş questioned such a response when

he said "what will solve by bombing all provinces just because a few youth took up arms?" (Daily Sabah, 2016). Furthermore, as the clashes in Cizre worsened, with reports of civilians trapped in basements, Demirtaş and 30 HDP parliamentarians led a protest march to break the curfew on Cizre. Such an action was a clear show of support for Kurdish locals living in the town of Cizre. While the HDP leadership claimed such a march simply showed solidarity with Kurdish civilians trapped in the city, the government accused them of condoning the actions of the armed Kurdish youth. In an interview with me, a Kurdish journalist argued that the state had a clear tactic of blaming and undermining the HDP throughout this period.

> The state avoided criticizing the state violence at first, but instead focused the blame of all the violence on HDP – it was a clear tactic to paint the party in a bad light so they would lose support in the upcoming November elections. They refused to acknowledge the separate political actors within the Kurdish movement, and used the violence to try and marginalize HDP entirely (Kurdish journalist, personal interview, 2019).

The violence that erupted in the region put the HDP in an impossible position. On the one hand, the party could not afford to lose the support of the young pro-PKK voters that represented its core electoral base. Likewise, siding too openly with such a base risked unleashing the Turkey's judiciary which could lead to the party's banning (much like its predecessors) and members prosecuted. Either way, the significant gains that the party had made in the June 2015 election would be lost. Immediately following the killing of 2 police officers in Ceylanpınar on July 22nd – the attack that signalled the breakdown of the peace process – Demirtaş attempted to clarify his position: "Blood cannot be cleaned with blood. Blood cannot be washed off with blood. Despite all these obstacles, we will continue our efforts within a peaceful and democratic struggle. This is our path. As the HDP, we do not approve of any other way or method" (Cumhuriyet, 2015). In early

August, during an interview with Alev Scott, the HDP co-chair went further and called

on the PKK to stop their attacks and stated that "the two sides should take their fingers

off the trigger and the weapons should be silenced" (Scott, 2015).

Despite such attempts to separate the party from the militants launching attacks

against Turkey's security forces, the ambiguity surrounding HDP's position was due to

its position on democratic autonomy. The dilemma the party faced was compounded by

the fact that the very demands that the pro-PKK youth were making in various cities –

for democratic autonomy and some form of regional self-governance – was exactly what

HDP and its predecessor parties had been demanding for many years. Demirtaş, in a

speech in late August 2015, attempted to clarify HDP's position,

> Self-governance is legal in that the people demand it. Self-governance is already
> in our party program, and if negotiations continue with the government, we
> planned to advocate such a form of governance legally through such
> negotiations. Because of that, it is impossible to say the demand for self-
> management of the people is illegal as that would go against our own party
> program and soul. But our difference is we believe there shouldn't be violence or
> guns. HDP should search for this solution through democratic means. But the
> demand for self-governance is the decision of the people, and we interpret it as
> the will of the people (Korkusuz Medya, 2015).

In this speech, Demirtaş tried to clarify HDP's support for the ultimate goal of

democratic autonomy and self-governance, while also distinguishing his party's

preference for peaceful means to achieve such an outcome. However, In December

2015, with the urban clashes continuing across the south-east, Demirtaş and the HDP

attended a conference held by the DTK in Diyarbakir. During the extraordinary

congress, the HDP MPs present, including Demirtaş, decided with some reluctance to

accept the vote for autonomy. The Political Declaration declared that,

Today the government portrays the conflict as an issue of trenches to legitimize its own policy of fighting "terrorism," but the Kurdish people are undertaking a legitimate resistance, demanding democratic self-government at the local level. Because their longstanding demand for legal and political status has not been recognized, they have started a struggle relying on their own resources (New Compass, 2016).

HDP's decision to support such a political declaration, which openly describes the urban clashes as a 'legitimate resistance', undoubtedly led to the prosecutions that followed against the party – MPs were stripped of their immunity in May 2016 and Demirtaş and several other MPS were detained in November. Due to the heavy handed response of the state, who imposed a security-first approach to the conflict, the HDP felt obliged to support the "self-defence" strategy of the pro-PKK youth.

In March 2016, Erdoğan summarized the government position when he said that fighting terrorism was the priority: "Democracy, freedom and the rule of law have absolutely no value any longer. Those who stand on our side in the fight against terrorism are our friends. Those on the opposite side are our enemy" (Deutsche Welle, 2016). Such an approach had immensely destructive consequences. From August 2015 – March 2016, 65 curfews were declared, which sometimes lasted for months at a time (TIHV, 2016). More than 10,000 were detained throughout this period, with International Crisis Group estimating that 1,700 people were killed (including both insurgents and civilian population) (International Crisis Group, 2016). The military were given free rein to crush the insurgency, and through the use of curfews, it reduced entire neighbourhoods across the southeast to rubble.

The PKK's strategic goal had been banking on the bulk of the Kurdish population joining the insurgency, but such momentum never materialized. While much

of the Kurdish population were outraged by the security forces destructive operations across the southeast, there was widespread anger towards the PKK for deciding to engage in urban guerrilla warfare. Rather than joining the insurgency, the majority of the civilian population fled the entrenched quarters when the curfews were imposed. In late 2015, a survey concluded that 43% of respondents believed the PKK's strategy of trench warfare should be aborted (Yanmis, 2016). Both the PKK and the state believed the other side was losing support during the urban warfare. "The state argues that the PKK's shift to urban warfare has enraged once sympathetic residents. The PKK argues that the use of heavy weapons in towns and cities provokes a region-wide backlash against Ankara" (International Crisis Group, 2016).

For the HDP, the actions of the pro-PKK youth in cities across the south-east pulled them into an uneasy position. Careful not to condemn the actions, HDP attempted to portray themselves as supportive of the project without directly condoning the violence. Having succeeded in securing 80 seats in parliament in the June 2015 election through a campaign that focused on the party as a Türkiyeli party that would represent the entirety of the country, the militancy of the Kurdish youth pulled them back into a regional party speaking up for Kurdish rights and actions. This tension, where the party is continuously pulled from being a party to represent Kurdish interests while at the same time attempting to embrace a more universalist Türkiyeli identity, once again influenced the policies of the party. Understanding such a tension within the project of Türkiyelileşme is key to understanding the politics of the party.

The state, having altogether dropped the peace process, took up a hawkish strategy and accused the HDP of harbouring militants within it, using municipal funds to

support the 'trench-digging', and legitimizing the armed insurrection in cities across the south-east. In contrast, many of the Kurdish youth engaged in clashes with the security forces felt that the party leadership was ignoring their plight altogether. The ambiguity of the HDP position is summarized by the contrasting positions that HDP co-leader Selahattin Demirtaş took during those months. In July, soon after the clashes erupted and Kurdish militants began digging trenches in the south-east, Demirtaş called on the PKK to lay down their arms and not escalate the clashes with security forces.

However, with the outbreak in violence, HDP politicians found themselves at odds with much of the wave of violence that had swept across the region, and as a result, by the time of the November 2015 elections, the party chose to largely ignore the concept of democratic autonomy altogether. This was partly strategic as the party found themselves caught between the state and the militants. In the November 2015 manifesto, the party attempted to clarify the ambiguity surrounding their support for democratic autonomy, which across Turkey had become synonymous to the trench-digging youths clashing with military forces. "Self-government is a democratic and autonomous model of decentralism. It is possible for Turkey's unity and a fully democratic parliamentary system to take shape. Self-government is simply local democracy, and opposed to the governor (valiler) and district governor (kaymakam) system adopted by Ankara (HDP, 2015)."

Despite the shift to emphasizing democratic autonomy as simply a system which would shift power towards local democracy, it is clear that the party felt obliged to clarify their position on democratic autonomy and its understanding of self-government. With Ankara becoming increasingly incensed by the 'self-government' declarations by

Kurdish militants in cities and their decision to crackdown on such activity, HDP were

forced into a defensive position whereby they attempted to distinguish their

understanding of the concept from the Kurdish militants. Such a dynamic mirrors what

the HDP MP for Van explained to me in an interview:

> The hendek çatışmaları [trench clashes] certainly didn't help the Turkish public's understanding of democratic autonomy which we had been developing for more than 10 years. As a party, we wanted to clarify that the concept had more potential than simply being a form of armed defence against the Turkish state, but rather was a proposal for an entirely new system of governance. But because of the state's refusal to engage with it, it is now unfortunately associated with the actions that happened in those clashes (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018

Thus, HDP's decision to clarify their position on democratic autonomy in their

November manifesto was a clear attempt by the party to distance themselves from the

Kurdish militants engaged in armed conflict with security forces in cities across the

south-east. However, as discussed above, the fact that HDP reverted back to supporting

the militants at the DTK conference in December that year by describing the resistance

as "legitimate" underlines the confusion within the party. One HDP MP for Diyarbakir

described to me the disorientation and crisis the party was undergoing at the time:

> HDP came out of the so-called peace process, and its political discourse was shaped by it. When the peace process came to an end, the political climate changed abruptly. This was something we didn't expect and it put the party in a structural crisis as we were established to promote peace. After our success on June 7th [election], everyone expected us to achieve peace. But exactly the opposite happened. So this was incredibly disorientating for the HDP. When the government started attacking Kurdish towns, as the HDP we had to be there. That was the battlefield – when we were involved in those kinds of struggles, the people we represent expected us to be there. And then we were criticised for becoming like the DBP – a thoroughly Kurdish party. Simultaneously while all this violence was taking place, as the HDP we were still promoting a discourse of peace and soft discourses in Turkey as a whole. But Kurdish people in towns like Cizre and Sur were saying the peace process ended under the debris of Cizre's basements, why are you demanding peace? So expectations shifted among our electorate, when you look at Cizre specifically, on the one hand the HDP was

accused of being a Kurdish party when the state was destroying residential areas with tanks that went against international law. So we had to be there and as a result we were criticised for being a Kurdish party. But we never became a Kurdish party; the Turkish state was simply destroying Kurdish towns so that's why we were there. Simultaneously from the Kurdish side, they expected more from us. 'What peace are you talking about' they said. Don't talk about peace; we don't want to hear about peace after all these killings. This is what they were saying. So the political climate was rapidly changing, and as the HDP we were trying to find a balance somehow. I think that was quite disorientating, and it was a kind of structural crisis for us (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018).

Therefore, in conclusion, it is clear that the breakdown in the peace process and the ensuing urban clashes that consumed the region from the summer of 2015 had a disorientating effect on the HDP. Unlike many of the previous pro-Kurdish parties, who had to balance their demands for Kurdish rights while the PKK was engaged in armed conflict with the Turkish state, the HDP had been entirely shaped during a peaceful period of the PKK conflict. The rise of HDP from Demirtaş's presidential campaign in 2014 and the success of the June 2015 elections had taken place while a peace process was ongoing. Much of their increased popularity across non-Kurdish segments of society was due to the lack of violence with which they campaigned in. So when the war broke out, the HDP had to adjust quickly, something which they struggled to do.

Despite calling for autonomy, the Kurdish militants that took up arms across Kurdish towns in the south-east in late 2015 reflected a certain ethnic nationalist reflex that the Kurdish political movement had attempted to distance from ideologically. The violence erupted in towns which were arguably the least integrated into Turkishness politically, culturally and linguistically. If anything, the militants' absolute rejection of the peace process – along with the ongoing HDP project focusing on dialogue and integration through the establishment of a pluralist identity - contained a clear rejection of the project of Türkiyelileşme. As the Diyarbakir HDP MP points out, the party had

some difficulty in convincing the youth to continue with HDP's agenda for peace, and thus we once again observe a fluctuation between a Türkiyelileşme agenda and a more forceful ethno-nationalist understanding of Kurdishness. HDP found itself attempting to balance itself between the immediate demands of Kurdish militants and the more long-term project of Türkiyelileşme.

CHAPTER 7

BINDING THE MULTIPLE IDENTITIES WITHIN THE PARTY

Having analysed the democratic discourse within HDP and the difficulties surrounding

democratic autonomy in Chapter 6, this chapter looks to analyse the different

components within HDP's political structure. As has already been discussed, HDP's

political project incorporates a series of subjectivities and identities within it, and the

concept rests on the idea that the party as a whole represents a sum greater than its parts.

This chapter is divided into four sections, each analysing a particular dynamic

within the party. The first looks into the political structure of the organisation, and how

the party have attempted to build a structure which allows and actively encourages

concurrent political struggles. Through a Congress as well as a party, HDP have tried to

allow for their party to become a political space which incorporates a variety of external

struggles.

The second section looks at the relationship between Turkish socialist groups and

the HDP, and in particular contains a variety of interviews with Turkish socialist HDP

MPs who entered the party from a Turkish leftist organisation. Specifically, I examine

the reasons behind the participation of two socialist groups, the Socialist Democracy

Party (SDP) and the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP).

The third part looks at the Kürdistani discourse and how it critiques both

Türkiyelileşme and the wider project of HDP. Specifically, it analyses the rejection of

the Kurdish movement's attempt to construct a dynamic political identity, and instead

calls for a return of a politics that incorporates the cultural characteristics of the Kurdish ethnicity.

The last section attempts to understand the 'logic of differences' that underpin the HDP. Rather than attempting to create a uniform, fixed identity, this chapter uses neo-Gramscian theory to examine how HDP have attempted to incorporate different identities to create a broad counterhegemonic front.

7.1 A 'party of parties': The political structure of HDP

As has been discussed in chapter 5, the Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK) was founded in October 2011 on the back of BDP's election a few months earlier. In the 2007 general election, DTP had contested as part of the "One Thousand Candidates" alongside socialist organisations, feminists and environmentalists. Likewise, prior to the 2011 election, BDP had established an electoral alliance called the "Democracy and Freedom Block" with as many as twenty other smaller leftist organisations. These included the Labour Party (EMEP), Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP), Socialist Democracy Party (SDP), Socialist Solidarity Party (SODAP), Socialist Reconstruction Party (SKYP), and the Green and Left Future (YSG). With the formation of HDK, this alliance was expanded to include LGBT activists, environmentalists, various trade unions and a number of representatives of various religious minorities.

All together, the HDK included thirty-five organisations and parties, and was established with the participation of 820 delegates. The Congress was organised in a bottom-up manner, and originated from a series of local assemblies. While the HDP was

not founded for another year, the Congress was originally conceived as the main organisation, with the party only mobilising around elections. By uniting various social movements into a common political project, the Congress hoped to develop their project of radical democracy. Furthermore, by not succumbing to simply being a political party, the hope was the Congress would allow the organisation to work more actively and effectively in grassroots organising.

However, while this was the initial plan, over the years the HDP has supplanted the Congress as the main point of organising, and the HDK has struggled to play an active role in politics. One of the original co-spokesperson of the Congress when it was formed in 2011, believed that the fact that the HDP is not just a party but also has its own Congress, allowed for the party to have its own dynamic life which other political party organisations have failed to have. However, he also explained that the original plan of HDK encompassing all the organisations within it has failed:

> Originally, the idea was that HDK would encompass everything, with the party simply being a facade of it. But the party has turned out to be something more vivid than the HDK itself, and thus the party sucked all the living elements from the Congress and became central in itself. But maybe this is because of Turkey's political and democratic atmosphere, in that nothing but a political party is seen as a legitimate element in the eyes of Turkish people. In this sense movements or grassroots initiatives have never managed to replace political parties – this is not just the case for HDP, but also for AKP, CHP and the others. So every HDP member is automatically a member of the HDK, but the members rarely participate within the HDK. It's also worth remembering that every year we've had an election, so this has made the HDP a campaigning party, always in motion and continuously campaigning and contesting elections. So for many people the question was why do we need HDK, we are doing the same thing, we are doing grassroots works, so HDK has become irrelevant (HDP former co-chair, personal interview, 2018).

Erdem Yörük argues that the movement should reprioritize the Congress over the HDP

as it is more suitable political structure to reorganise and compete within working class

neighbourhoods:

> There are two reasons why I believe we should reprioritize the HDK. First, from
> an electoral perspective, many observe the long-standing popular support for the
> governing AKP largely stems from its broad grassroots organizing campaigns.
> These activities, which focus on poor neighbourhoods, range from providing
> formal and informal social safety nets to developing clientelist networks. This is
> a crucial feature of the AKP's strategy to construct hegemony. This consolidates
> its political rule with a societal leadership that attempts to win the active consent
> of the governed population, including the Kurdish poor and working class.
> Therefore, since the HDP is the only party that has the intention and the capacity
> to compete with the AKP in working class neighbourhoods, we should prioritize
> the daily grassroots organizing of material life, for which the HDK is an ideal
> structure. With this, we can continue to build a counter-hegemony that can rival
> the power of the AKP. The second reason why we should reprioritize the HDK is
> that, from a more long-term perspective, the revolutionary transformation of
> society and the state requires the reorganization of daily life in an anti-systemic
> and anti-capitalist manner (Yörük, 2018, p.123).

As HDP's project involves the reorganisation of society, and the communication

between different ethnic, religious and gender identities, the argument is that HDK fully

represents a broader cross-section of society than the HDP do as a party. However, given

the numerous elections that have taken place in Turkey since its formation in 2012, HDP

itself has grown into the primary organisation while activity within HDK remains

limited. Numerous politicians and activists that I interviewed conceded this, and

struggled to imagine HDK being given the attention needed to refocus the movement.

Yörük also argues that the HDP-HDK structure resembles the left regroupment

tradition of left-wing parties such as the Workers Party in Brazil, Podemos in Spain or

Left Unity in the UK. These parties "regroup not only radical left organisations but also

a more heterogeneous alliance of left-wing opposition groups struggling for issues like

the autonomy of religious and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ rights, environmentalism and feminism" (Yörük, 2018, p.124). However, the fact that the legal wing was born out and inspired by the illegal wing of the Kurdish movement, it is clear that HDP is not comparable to Sinn Fein's relationship to the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Furthermore, another unique feature of HDP's project is that an ethnic minority – in this case, the Kurds – are attempting to transform their struggle into a counterhegemonic movement that incorporates broad radical left platforms.

Thus, the structural nature of the HDP, and its relationship with HDK, means there is an underlining tension between the party and the movement. One activist told me that the failure of HDK to become the primary political actor meant it was hard to imagine the organisation successfully reorganising Turkish society and becoming the primary counterhegemonic agent in Turkey (HDP activist, personal interview, 2019). Much in the left regroupment tradition, partnering leftist organisations retain their status within the party. This means that rather than HDP replacing the organisations that entered the party structure, party members retain their status as members within the participant organisations that exist, and thus HDP in fact becomes a "party of parties." The former co-chair explained to me that this is partly to keep the heterogeneous nature of the party intact, as by joining HDP, the participant parties do not lose their status as an active political actor with its own membership system. However, he also said there have been some moves to try and change this, with Selahattin Demirtaş himself proposing a reform in 2015:

> Demirtaş himself is opposed to the 'party of parties' model of HDP currently, and soon after our June 2015 electoral success, he proposed reforming the party into a party of individuals like most conventional parties. This was partly an

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attempt to distinguish the party more fully from the PKK, who were very much against such an idea as it would make the party more autonomous from them if this went through. It was also voted down by all the participant parties, although there is group of left individuals within the party who like this idea of replacing all the different parties into the single Peoples' Democratic Party. However, while I like the idea personally as an independent, the problem with Demirtaş's reform is that HDP's organising ability is particularly strong because of the activity of all the participant parties. Whereas, the individuals within the party are much smaller in comparison, and therefore to reform the party in such a way would damage our ability for grassroots organising as a party (HDP former co-chair, personal interview, 2018).

Thus, by remaining a 'party of parties', the HDP have tried to capture the energy and heterogeneous range of struggles that co-exist within the party system. Furthermore, much like the original conception of HDK, the party hoped that by having a range of organisations and structures within the party, they would be able to combine struggles against hegemony. Nicos Poulantzas argues that the road to democratic socialism can only be achieved through a thorough transformation of the state that combines "the transformation of representative democracy with the development of forms of direct, rank-and-file democracy or the movement for self-management" (Poulantzas, 1978, p.79). Hence, in Poulantzas's view, the state can be transformed when internal and external struggles are combined. Rather than reducing the debate to whether struggles should take place within or outside the state structures, he argues that participation in representative politics is only valid if it is combined with external struggles simultaneously. This is combined well within HDP's own discourse, whereby the structure of the organisation as a bottom-up umbrella party of allying groups would allow it to challenge the state internally through representative democracy in the form of elections whilst also developing external struggles across the country.

The party structure also allows for a surprising level of autonomy within the struggles it represents. One striking example is the women's assembly, which along with the youth assembly, has autonomy from the other party political bodies. One HDP activist who is on the executive board for both the youth and women's assembly explained that,

> When the women's assembly makes a decision during their meetings, it cannot be blocked or annulled by the main party in the general assemblies. This gives us complete autonomy, and the idea behind it is the party privileges both the women's and youth movement as the most vibrant and important struggle for Turkey in the near future. It is also an attempt to separate the party's goal of challenging the state through elections while not compromising the potential of the feminist struggles externally. They want to support the women's movement in Turkey as much as possible; by giving our assembly complete autonomy, the view is that the party simply doesn't have the power to weaken such initiatives from taking place (HDP party activist, personal interview, 2019).

Thus, we can see that the HDP's own structure has attempted to give the external counterhegemonic struggles which they see as an essential part of the movement a degree of autonomy as a means not to suffocate the potential of such external struggles. The assemblies themselves are there to support a variety of external struggles, and alongside the women and youth, various Labour and environmental assemblies are particularly important centres of political action. As another activist explained to me,

> The assemblies are an essential part of the party, and the sheer mobilisation and involvement of party activists within them is what separates us from most other parties. Often activists' party engagement and involvement in the party is purely within these assemblies, which include MPs as well as grassroots activists. The decision-making process is always through consensus, and it leads to a very egalitarian form of politics taking place. I think the success of such assemblies is one of the main reasons HDP has been able to remain vibrant and energetic despite the mass arrests against party members over the last few years (HDP party activist, personal interview, 2019).

Thus, it is clear that HDP has positioned itself as more than a mere party in that it unites a variety of struggles into its party structure. Much of the focus of the party has been on

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supporting a range of activism across Turkey's heterogeneous opposition while not suffocating these very external struggles within the parliamentary politics of elections. Despite the sheer number of elections, which activists have conceded has put a strain on the tension between the party and the movements it represents, the external struggles remains a core feature of the HDP.

7.2 A party of the left: Turkish left participation in the party

While the previous part discussed HDP's political structure and its relationship with HDK and external social movements in general, I now analyse HDP's involvement with the Turkish Left and its attempt to become a national, leftist party. As has been discussed in previous chapters, the Kurdish movement has long attempted to appeal to a leftist discourse by articulating universalist conceptions of democracy and human rights. While such a strategy underlined the potential of their appeal beyond the Kurdish electorate, they only began to make inroads with the establishment of DEHAP and DTP in the 2000s, and their successful electoral alliances with different Turkish leftists and socialist organisations.

The first known alliance took place in the 2002 general election, when DEHAP allied themselves with Akın Birdal's Sosyalist Demokrasi Partisi (SDP: Socialist Democracy Party) and Emeğin Partisi (EMEP: Labour Party). This alliance continued during the 2004 local elections, when the Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi (ÖDP: Freedom and Solidarity Party) and Özgür Parti (ÖP: Free Party) joined SDP and EMEP in an alliance with the pro-Kurdish DEHAP.

However not only was DTP's participation as the Thousand Hope Candidates considered a success in that they gained 22 deputies in parliament and thus resumed national representation for the first time in over a decade, but two of the deputies – Kurdish politician Sebahat Tuncel and ÖDP President and Turkish activist Ufak Uras – were elected from Istanbul which showed important inroads were being made to becoming a truly national party b successfully contesting elections in the western provinces.

Such a success was further developed with the electoral alliance of the Labour, Democracy and Freedom Bloc that BDP established for the 2011 election. This strategy proved successful, with 36 deputies elected as independents. Of the 36 independents, a number were elected from urban centres in western Turkey, and included Turkish human rights activist Akın Birdal, Ertuğrul Kürkçü, Labour Party leader Levent Tüzel, and the Turkish leftist film director Sırrı Süreyya Önder.

These electoral alliances provided the backbone and catalyst for the launching of the HDK and HDP. The success of these alliances was evidence that a pro-Kurdish party could "advance more effectively its cause at national level" and that "the Kurdish movement needed to find the appropriate political vessel to broaden its natural geographical constituency. Exploiting the vacuum on the left flank of the Turkish opposition was thought to be the solution to help anchor the new party into national politics" (Gisselbrecht, 2014).

Of the most important figures that stayed within HDP after the party was restructured to include BDP within its structure in 2014, EMEP's Levent Tüzel, Ertuğrul

Kürkçü and Sırrı Süreyya Önder were the most prominent non-Kurdish figures within

the party. Interestingly, while Levent Tüzel remained an MP until 2015, his Labour

Party (EMEP) decided to withdraw from HDP after BDP was incorporated into HDP. As

their party statement said, EMEP believed BDP's incorporation into the party threatened

the balance of the party and thus decided to withdraw from HDP's project for radical

democracy in line with their own ideological and political goals (EMEP, 2014). While

the party continued to participate in HDK and supported Demirtaş in his presidential bid

and HDP in the subsequent elections, such a withdrawal underlines the tension that does

exist between the Kurdish movement and participant leftist groups that are allied within

the party.

The two other Turkish leftist groups that are especially important are Ezilenlerin

Sosyalist Partisi (ESP: Socialist Party of the Oppressed) and Socialist Demokrasi Partisi

(SDP: Socialist Democratic Party). ESP is most well-known for Figen Yüksekdağ, the

previous leader of the party before she became co-leader of the HDP alongside

Demirtaş.

ESP are known as one of the most vocal supporters of the Kurdish movement,

and it was their youth wing, Socialist Youth Associations Federation (SGDF) that were

the target of an ISIS suicide bomb in the Kurdish town of Suruç while the group were

travelling to assist with the reconstruction of Kobane. Described as a militant

revolutionary socialist party, the ESP have been one of the earliest supporters of the pro-

Kurdish parties since they were founded in 2010. Their party goal is to fight for a

"workers labourers federative republic in Turkey and Northern Kurdistan" and define

themselves as a revolutionary mass party seeking to unite the struggles of all the

oppressed sectors of society (ESP, 2015). An ESP party member and HDP MP explained

to me ESP's approach to the Kurdish issue and why the party supports the HDP project:

> Both I and my party have their roots in the Turkish socialist tradition since the 1920s.For me, ESP interprets the Kurdish national issue and the class conflict within a socialist perspective as two sides of the same coin. These are the two fundamental issues of the social and political struggle in Turkey. The significance of ESP is that it takes the struggle itself serious and has developed a program answering both the class issues from a socialist perspective in Turkey as well as the Kurdish national question – we believe they are inseparable. Therefore, we interpret the Kurdish national question within a class-based analysis as a form of colonialism against the Kurdish people. Likewise, our support for HDP's project stems from our belief that the class problem in Turkey cannot be solved while the Kurdish people continue to suffer under colonialism and a democratic deficit continues to prevail in Turkey. We are both components of this struggle and the resolution of both class conflict and Kurdish national problem. Our idea began before HDP was formed – we were organised informally since the 1990s, but ESP was the crystallisation of these ideas outlined above (ESP member and HDP MP, personal interview, 2019).

Thus, for the ESP, class and the Kurdish national situation are inseparable, and their

Marxist-Leninist political standpoint believes that the class consciousness cannot be

achieved unless Turkey solves the Kurdish national question in tandem with the broader

issues of class across western Turkey. When compared to the Kurdish movement and

Öcalan's ideas of democratic confederalism, ESP appear to be more strictly orthodox

and Marxist in their perspective.

Another important group Turkish socialist group that play a prominent role

within HDP are the Socialist Democracy Party (SDP). Although the SDP have recently

rebranded themselves as the Revolutionary Party (DP: Devrimci Partisi), SDP's

originated from the more well-known Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP) before

separating in the 2000s. Such a separation underlines the debates and conflicts within the

Turkish left on how to approach the Kurdish question. The SDP was formed in 2002

after disputes emerged over some of ÖDP's members supporting the Kurdish hunger

strikes that were taking place across the south-east at the time. As one HDP MP who is

the former leader of SDP explained, the disputes that took place over supporting the

Kurdish hunger strikes led to the formation of the SDP:

> SDP have its roots in the Kurtuluş [Liberation] movement which follows the
> tradition of Mahir Çayan. When ÖDP decided not to support the hunger strikes,
> we refused to obey such a decision and openly disagreed with it. Our main
> argument was we must defend resistance on the street, and we had a more
> militant tradition of solidarity that necessitated our support for the hunger strikes.
> As a result of our public disagreement with the party's central committee, we
> were kicked out of the party during the party's discipline committees. It was a
> result of this that we established the SDP in 2002 (HDP MP, personal interview,
> 2019).

ÖDP themselves were founded in 1994 and, much like HDP, were founded as an

umbrella party to represent the progressive front of Turkey in the late 1990s. To begin

with, they did represent such a front and prominent HDP politician Ertuğrul Kürkçü was

involved along with many other figures. However, starting in 2001, in-fighting broke out

regarding the issue of hunger strikes, and led to a number of resignations. Whilst the

party have always resisted joining HDP or other pro-Kurdish parties, there have been

some electoral alliances over the years. In the 2004 local elections, they allied with the

pro-Kurdish DEHAP to form an electoral coalition with a number of other parties, while

their previous chairman, Ufuk Uras, successful entered parliament as an independent

after running on the Thousand Hopes alliance with DTP in the 2007 general election.

However, despite such alliances with pro-Kurdish parties, the HDP MP and former SDP

leader points out that within the Freedom and Solidarity Party there is much hesitation to

fully join any pro-Kurdish alliance and why SDP views the matter differently:

As SDP, we believe in supporting the Kurdish movement and groups – when we were inside ÖDP we defended the idea that without understanding and solving the Kurdish issues, we cannot solve the problems of the left. We believed we should make a strategic alliance with Kurds, but ÖDP opposed such a strategy and ODP were more engaged with achieving a certain energy within civil society and creating a pressure on the state through the party. In this, ÖDP were less interested in transforming society and instead were a civil society organisation with a pluralist agenda. SDP are more revolutionary and believe that Kurds have the necessary revolutionary potential for a democratic people's revolution. Thus while ÖDP focused more on left liberalism, national socialism and a democratic revolution, we focused entirely on the democratic revolutionary aspect. We saw ÖDP as much further to the right of the political spectrum, and they lacked the perspective that the working class form the basis of the revolution. All these ideological differences meant as a party ÖDP were uninterested in forming a strategic alliance with Kurds (HDP MP and former SDP leader, personal interview, 2019).

Among other things, SDP's ideological focus has been on the three trends of left liberalism, national leftism and revolutionary socialism, and they accused ÖDP of falling into a bureaucratic party that was more in line with a liberal middle-class party compared to a truly socialist party. Another bone of contention was ÖDP's support of the European Union (which SDP were firmly opposed too), but the issue surrounding forming a strategic alliance with Kurds was the biggest disagreement that eventually led to the split.

As a party that passionately believes in forming a strategic alliance with Kurds, the former SDP leader points out that SDP's approach is directly opposed to the Stalinist model of having one workers party:

Our theory of socialist democracy is based on the consolidation of various socialist allies and different groups to combine under a united banner with a common aim. This allows for more views to be voiced and creates a dynamism and organic movement which isn't possible under one party. In this way we don't believe a revolution can be achieved by a single party – this is a primary reason why we are involved with HDP. For us, we define the Kurdish movement as a project leading a socialist movement which connects the Turkish and Kurdish leftist tradition together. HDP, as an umbrella party, has an overarching

aim to unite and bring together all the oppressed people of Turkey; therefore we see the party as a kind of vehicle that brings us closer to our ideological aims (HDP MP and former SDP leader, personal interview, 2019).

Thus, in conclusion, both SDP and ESP's involvement in HDP is rooted in their belief that the Kurds offer an important revolutionary potential in achieving their goals of a democratic revolution in Turkey. While ESP's support for the HDP's project focuses on the importance of coalescing the class struggle in western Turkey with the Kurdish struggle in the south-east, SDP's project focus more particularly on the need to bring out a democratic revolution that can only be achieved through solving the Kurdish question. In this, while both are defined in a revolutionary tradition, ESP's language is far more radical with constant reference to colonialism rather than SDP's language of democracy.

However, while the involvement of a number of Turkish leftist groups has informed the political trajectory of the HDP, a number of disagreements with other leftist groups underscore the tension that exists within the party between the Kurdish movement and Turkish leftists. ÖDP's stance against the Kurdish movement, as well as EMEP's decision to withdraw their participation in HDP following BDP's integration into the party system in 2014, only proved to accentuate the delicate balance. The next part attempts to evaluate such a tension more deeply by analysing the tension that exists with the more nationalist and militant tendencies that are prevalent within the broad Kurdish movement.

7.3 The Kürdistani discourse: critiquing Türkiyelileşme

While the relationship between the Turkish Left and the HDP has been much disputed and discussed in Turkish media as well as within academia, a less discussed tension

which underscores the party is the disputes that have existed within the wider Kurdish political arena from a Kürdistani perspective. While the state and many commentators often see the Kurdish movement and wider Kurdish political entities as broadly a single block, this is not strictly the case. Within the Kurdish political arena, there are many different actors with a range of different ideological and strategic goals. This section attempts to analyse such a heterogeneous field, with a specific discussion on the Kürdistani discourse and its influence on the HDP.

The Kurdish nationalist groups can be broadly separated into two groups: the Barzani-inspired Kurdish nationalists, who attract a more conservative pool of Kurdish nationalists compared to the more left-wing Kurdish movement, and the Kurdish Islamists groups that have been influential since the rise of the AKP in south-east. The nationalist groups tend to criticise the HDP and the broader Kurdish political movement for sacrificing Kurdish national and cultural goals in favour of their ideological vision, and include such parties as HAK-PAR (Rights and Freedom Party), PSK (Kurdistan Socialism Party), Kurdistan Democratic Party – Turkey (KDPT), Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK), and Freedom and Socialism Party (ÖSP).

Much of the ideological differences between these nationalist groups and the Kurdish movement can be traced back to the disagreements that emerged between the PKK and other Kurdish political movements that have been discussed in Chapter 3. The field of competition of these early Kurdish actors was diverse, but the majority of Kurdish intellectuals spring from the 49-ers[15], TIP or DDKO, while the PKK traced their

[15] In 1959, 50 Kurds were imprisoned under Adnan Menderes's government. They were called the '49ers' after one of the detainees died before his trial. While there was a general amnesty after the 1960 coup,

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lineage to the Turkish rural guerrilla groups that had mushroomed in the early 1970s. Having links to this Çayan tradition of the Turkish left led many Kurdish intellectuals to perceive the PKK as imposters who had no connection with the tradition of Kurdish activism in the 1960s and 1970s.

In contrast, the Kurdish Islamists groups only began to materialize in the 1990s when Islamist politics in Turkey as a whole mushroomed with the rise of the Welfare Party. However, considering the substantial support for the AKP (as well as the Welfare Party in the 1990s) amongst the Kurdish electorate over the last two decades, Kurdish Islamist groups have played an important role. In many ways, Islam has provided a useful medium whereby Kurdish nationalists and activists were able to express their grievances. While parties such as HUDA-PAR and Azadi Movement are well-known Kurdish Islamist groups, as well as militant organisations such as Hizbullah who fought a bloody war against the PKK in the 1990s (Kurt, 2017), there are a number of civil society associations such as Mazlumder (İnsan Hakları ve Mazlumlar İçin Dayanışma Derneği) and Mustazafder (Mustazaflar İle Dayanışma Derneği). Mazlumder was especially important, in that ex-members İhsan Arslan and Abdurrahman Kurt both represented Diyarbakir for the ruling AKP and were highly influential in forming the AKP's Kurdish policy. Although he left the AKP before the peace process ended, Kurt played an important role in developing the ruling government's message that centred on Islamic bonds binding Turks and Kurds together, which itself became a powerful narrative during the peace process (Tezcür, 2009). In many ways, the Kurdish Islamists were key in mobilizing Kurdish support for the AKP throughout the 2000s, and are the

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these Kurds – who were imprisoned to repress Kurdish cultural activism – were not freed and their trial dragged on for years before all were acquitted.

only Kurdish group that have shown the potential to match the secular Kurdish movement in terms of mobilization of the Kurdish society.

While these Kürdistani parties (encompassing both Islamist and Kurdish nationalist groups) do not have a strong electoral base like the HDP, they are significant in that they have challenged HDP's assertion of representing the breath of politicised Kurds across the south-east. As one Kurdish journalist sympathetic to HAK-PAK explained,

> It is important not to gauge the influence of the Kurdish nationalist parties on the votes they have gained in elections, as this would diminish their influence. Their importance stems from being the ideological carriers of Kurdish frustration with the Kurdish movements shift away from independence, and their criticism of HDP's ideology has been consistent throughout the years. Lastly, I think the presence of these groups' shows the potential for a Kurdish political arena where the Kurdish movement doesn't have the 'hegemony' that it claims (Kurdish journalist, personal interview, 2018).

While both the Kurdistan nationalist and Islamist parties have distinct and separate critiques of the Kurdish movement, much of their grievances have crystallized into the frustration with HDP's alignment of the Turkish left and the party's inability to reach out to them. A Kurdish HDP MP, who has been engaged in dialogue with such groups in recent years, told me that the hesitation from within HDP to work with other Kurdish parties stems from the fear of weakening the Kurdish political movement's position vis-à-vis the Turkish state:

> The Kurdish movement has a strong inclination towards appearing as the sole representative of the Kurds when it comes to negotiations with the state. During the peace process, Islamist groups such as HUDA-PAR demanded that they should be consulted as a constituent representative of Kurds, which the state then used to question whether the PKK or HDP should be seen as sole representative of the Kurdish electorate. I think such a dynamic has made the Kurdish movement wary of cooperating with such groups as it would weaken HDP's

position if future peace negotiations would materialize (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018).

Such intransigence on the part of the HDP, as well as the BDP and DTP, has led to former advocates of the Kurdish movement to become alienated. For organisations with a similarly secular and left-leaning agenda as the HDP, such as HAK-PAR and PSK, the scepticism of the HDP rests more on the close relationship the party has with the PKK. One such example is former HAK-PAR leader, Fehmi Demir. Although he had been a founding member of Kurdish parties HEP and DEHAP in the 1990s, he joined and became leader of HAK-PAR in 2014 (until his death a year later) to promote his federalist agenda (Rudaw, 2015). While a federalist agenda was broadly in line with the Kurdish movement's democratic autonomy ideology, HAK-PAR's unequivocal criticism of the PKK and parties such as the HDP's inability to thoroughly separate themselves from the militant organisation features heavily in their party statements.

Thus, criticising the relationship between the PKK and the legal pro-Kurdish tradition has been a consistent point of criticism of the Kurdish movement. Francis O'Connor suggests that it would be naïve to suggest that the PKK did not influence party decisions at time, with one such example being PKK's overruling of DEHAP's decision to put forward the locally popular former Kawa[16] militant Mehmet Polat for the 1999 municipal elections of Adıyaman. Such a decision was due to PKK's distrust of Polat's background in Kawa, a rival of theirs in the 1970s (O'Connor, 2017, pp.12-13). However, such candidate selections do not always result in PKK's preference. In 2004, DEHAP managed to put forward their choice of Osman Baydemir for mayor of

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[16] Kawa was a well-known Maoist Kurdish armed movement that operated in the 1970s and clashed with the PKK on numerous occasions.

Diyarbakir, thereby overruling the PKK's preference for outgoing mayor Feridun Çelik (Watts, 2010, p.88).

While such a critical discourse has been central to these smaller Kurdish parties vis-à-vis its relationship with the HDP, due to the party's Türkiyelileşme agenda over recent years, the main bone of contention for many groups has been the involvement of Turkish left figures within the movement. Since the 2000s, DTP, BDP and HDP have consistently courted figures from the Turkish left rather than focus on building an alliance amongst Kurdish actors alone. Linking such a political strategy with the wider critique of the Kurdish movement's rejection of Kurdish independence in favour of democratic autonomy, Kurdish nationalists question whether HDP's exclusive focus on creating a democratic alliance with progressive Turkish political forces serves Kurdish national interest. As Sharo Garip argues, despite only gaining roughly 1% of HDP's vote, the marginal Turkish Left groups invariable take nearly 30 of HDP's seats. To Kurdish nationalists, HDP's attempt to court non-Kurdish political figures does not make strategic sense given the fraction of support HDP gets from the non-Kurdish electorate. Furthermore, Garip argues that HDP's exclusive focus on a 'primitive nationalism' – a form of nationalism that exclusively focuses on the ideological transformation of the Kurdish identity and ignores linguistic and cultural elements of Kurdish nationalism – is damaging to the broader goals of Kurds:

> The mainstream Kurdish political movement has focused on ideological priorities rather than on cultural and national values of Kurds. For 40 years, the Kurdish movement resembles the Kemalist or Soviet regime in that has entered a process of social engineering. The result is individuals who are transformed into ideological machines. As for the cultural, language and national problems, they will strike the armour of the Kurdish regime's 'primitive nationalism' ideology… such primitive nationalism's attempt to create a society based on an ideological-contract, rather than

a social contract that defends endangered cultures, is a form of grave engineering [on the part of the Kurdish movement] (Garip, 2018).

Thus, due to the Kurdish movement's exclusive focus on ideology, many Kurdish nationalists argue that the movement has failed to develop a strategy that resists cultural and linguistic assimilation, and thereby has failed to protect Kurdish political interests. While such a critique has existed long before the establishment of the HDP, the party's deeper adoption of a leftist discourse and proactive cooperation with different Turkish left political parties means that such criticism has become more pronounced. Such a tension came to a head within the HDP when, prior to the 2018 June election, Altan Tan, an Islamist Kurdish politician who was first elected as an MP for BDP in 2011 and had been a HDP MP since the party's establishment in 2012, announced that he wouldn't be running on a HDP electoral ticket as he had become alienated by HDP's exclusive focus on being a leftist organisation. Tan, who entered politics through Erbakan's Islamist Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) in the 1990s before joining pro-Kurdish HADEP in 2000, was an outspoken Islamist who was popular with conservative Kurds in his hometown of Diyarbakir. He explained his decision to leave HDP was due to the failure of HDP to unite with other Kurdish parties as well as the domination of leftist politics within the party:

> I believe HDP have handled the process since 7 June [election] very badly. I also think that it is wrong how effective the marginal left are within the Kurdish political movement. I wish HDP would form an alliance with HUDA-PAR. While the ruling AKP and other parties' treatment of HDP has been objectionable, HDP have done the same to HUDA-PAR. HDP have ruled out an alliance with them, if only there could be an alliance amongst the Kurdish political parties. While HDP continue to encourage marginal leftist groups to join the party, they refuse to ally themselves with other pro-Kurdish parties (Cumhuriyet, 2018).

Tan claims that HDP had failed to offer the pan-Kurdish unity that he desired, and was alienated by the HDP's encouragement of leftist groups within the party. The tension between representing Kurdish interests and representing the broader Turkish left had discussed broadly in Turkish media since January 2018, when former HDP MP Hasip Kaplan said "a Türk shouldn't have their eye in the place of Demirtaş" (Gazete Duvar, 2018). This was broadly interpreted as a criticism of the upcoming election of HDP co-chairs at the HDP Congress in February 2018, where the Turkish politician Sezai Temelli was standing unopposed alongside Pervin Buldan. While such an election continued HDP's policy of having one leader from the Kurdish movement and another as a representative of the Turkish left, a HDP activist contextualised Kaplan's statement further:

> Many within the party saw Hasip Kaplan's statement as a thinly veiled criticism of Turkish leftist involvement within the party as well as a form of patriarchy. What Kaplan meant was he had no problem with Figen Yüksekdağ – as the Turkish leftist representative – being co-chair, but he couldn't accept the male leader coming from outside the Kurdish movement. Such a statement definitely contained elements of this within it, but more broadly it was an accusation of HDP's status as a leftist party of Turkey, rather than a strictly Kurdish nationalist party with an exclusive nationalist focus. Perhaps this is what he wants, but the HDP has never been that (Turkish HDP activist, 2018).

Some HDP MPs believe the exclusive focus on this so-called tension within HDP between the Turkish left and Kurdish nationalists is exaggerated in the Turkish media. As a Diyarbakir HDP MP explained:

> The criticisms that are directed at us from the so-called 'Kürdistani parties' is an attempt to change the political direction of the HDP. I actually think HDP is simultaneously a Kürdistani party as well as a party of Turkey... The problem with such a debate is there is a tendency to overstate the power of these parties. Huda-Par's popular base is around 50,000 votes across the country, but when it comes to such group's criticism of HDP, they get much attention. In fact, such groups political function often is too solely criticise the mainstream discourse of

the HDP due to the attention it brings the party. Furthermore, in contrast to these Kürdistani parties which are internally consistent and coherent in terms of ideology, HDP does not have such a strict political model. There are many different political traditions working simultaneously within HDP, and as a party these differences are continuously being negotiated and acknowledged as a collective. Such a model is exactly why we have more of a popular support than these Kürdistani parties – we offer a certain flexibility compared to the Kürdistani parties that have an inflexible, consistent ideological position (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018).

Thus, HDP as a political party have been wary to listen to such criticism as they believe that there party's model is more inclusive and attempts to incorporate a variety of political traditions into the party rather than focusing exclusively on one tradition of nationalism. While they have attempted to incorporate the Kurdish nationalist political tradition of the Kürdistani parties into their party, they don't want to exclusively focus on such a tradition. As one HDP MP told me, the party does not only represent Kurdish nationalists, and there are a number of "strategic voters that are wary of HDP becoming a Kurdish party" (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018), and thus it is the party's duty to listen to such expectations as well.

Despite such a strategic argument, it is also clear that the visions of HDP, with their political strategy of Türkiyelileşme and ideological focus on democratic autonomy, are very different to the more nationalistic focus that the Kürdistani parties have attempted to develop. One Kurdish journalist with strong sympathies with the Kürdistani tradition told me,

The Kürdistani parties really are afraid of the singular ideological focus of the HDP. To them, ideology can change overnight, while cultural and linguistic assimilation is irreversible. Right now, the ideological focus is on democratic autonomy, such a model has many benefits. But it fails to understand the most important aspect of Kurds – our distinct language and cultural traditions. If we lose them – which are very much under threat as the new generation becomes increasingly linguistically assimilated into Turkey – we have lost our biggest

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strength. So in this way all the Kürdistani parties are asking for is for a political shift of HDP from a focus on ideology towards a political strategy that focuses primarily on protecting our own culture and language (Kurdish journalist, personal interview, 2018).

While the focus of the Kürdistani parties remains firmly on protecting Kurds' distinctive cultural and linguistic characteristics, such an analysis fails to comprehend how different the Kurdish question is viewed by the two political traditions. The HDP have undoubtedly given more attention to their ideological perspective than such cultural concerns, but this stems from the party's belief that it is necessary to argue for a Turkey transformation if you believe that a resolution to the conflict lies within Turkey's territorial unity. While Kürdistani parties differ on the exact model necessary to resolve the conflict – parties such as HAK-PAR argue for a federal system of governance, placing them closer to HDP's model compared to parties like KDPT advocate an independent Kurdistan. Thus, if you believe in a resolution within Turkey's borders, one has to lead a political platform that engages with issues facing Turkey as a whole. In this sense, HDP's focus on being a 'party of Turkey' and working on issues across the country is in fact a reflection of their belief that the Kurdish conflict will be resolved within Turkey's borders. As one HDP MP explains:

> The tendency is for these Kürdistani groups to criticise why, as Kurds, are dealing Turkish issues when we should be dealing with our own problems. Is it really up to us to save Turkey? This is the most frequently asked voiced criticism. But it seems that if you want to resolve the Kurdish conflict within the territorial unity of Turkey, you need to help transform Turkey. So if you have some other project then that is completely legitimate – some Kurds want a separate nation state, which is equally legitimate as a political project. But where I'd disagree with these criticisms is that Kurdish question has never been a question of simply identity or culture – instead it's a question of sovereignty. Whether the Kurds will be a sovereign people? I think this is crucial – that sovereignty can be exercised in different political forms, whether it is an autonomous or federal system. But most importantly, to achieve this as Kurds we have to produce a politics that acknowledges that sharing of sovereign power is

key to resolving the Kurdish conflict. Thus, the question of sovereignty is inherently tied to the question of identity and culture – the sovereign structure will be the form within which you can exercise your culture and identity rights. However, the Kürdistani parties continue to perceive the Kurdish issue as one of language, culture and identity. This is too simplistic, and HDP differs in the sense that the wider issue of sovereignty is addressed in our project of democratic autonomy which proposes some form of decentralised political structure in Turkey within which you can accommodate some limited form of Kurdish demands for self-rule. In many ways, this is exactly why the project of Türkiyelileşme is so important (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018).

Such an argument helps explain why HDP have been wary of focusing solely on linguistic or cultural rights for Kurds, and instead look beyond such dynamics by proposing a system which can allow for the protection of Kurdish rights. While Sharo Garip identifies such an approach as a form of 'primitive nationalism' (Garip, 2018) on the part of HDP in that ideological identity is developed at the expense of other cultural markers of identity, this HDP MP believes it is instead a question of sovereignty. And in many ways he is right to identify the lack of sovereignty within the Kürdistani tradition of politics, and their exclusive focus on resisting assimilation through the safeguarding of Kurdish languages fails to offer an alternative vision for Kurds within the territorial borders of the country.

Having said this, as Türkiyelileşme became increasingly criticised after the state's crackdown on the party, HDP have attempted to work alongside such parties in recent years. After Altan Tan criticised the party for failing to produce a pan-Kurdish political discourse, a number of alliances materialised in 2018 that sought to create such an alliance. One such initiative was the Kurdistan Election Alliance that formed in May 2018 and included PSK, Azadi Movement, KDPT and HAK-PAR, with support from the HDP (Al Monitor, 2018). Such an initiative, which was formed too late to compete in

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the June 2018 elections, but helped form a pan-Kurdish alliance that competed in the recent March 2019 municipal elections.

In Turkey, the Kurdistan Election Alliance aimed to target the 20% of the national vote that are Kurds. According to some polls, Kurdish voters accounted for 4% of the AKP vote in the 2015 elections. The alliance hoped to unite the AKP-voting Kurds with the HDP, but also aimed to provide a platform that would unite Kurds across the Middle East. A HDP MP, Imam Taşçier, who has been active in negotiating with other Kürdistani groups to try and establish such an alliance, claimed such a project was essentially a National Union of Kurds that would eradicate enmities between Kurds (Al Monitor, 2018).

Such a union between Kurds continued later in 2018 when HDP's sister party, the DBP, announced a Kurdish Language Protection and Development Platform in October which aimed to raw focus to the Kurds demands from language rights as well as to encourage Kurds to use their language more freely. The initiative included all the Kurdish nationalist parties which established the Kurdistan Election Alliance was a positive attempt on the part of the HDP to work more closely with the smaller Kurdish political parties. Following such an announcement, the imprisoned Selahattin Demirtaş announced his support for such an initiative in a public letter that said "any effort for the free, unimpeded use of Kurdish in all spheres of life, including education, the economy and social and political realms" (Al Monitor, 2018).

Given the criticism of the HDP by Kürdistani parties for failing to defend the Kurdish language against assimilation, such an approach shows HDP has tried to

incorporate better language rights into their party discourse. When asked if such an initiative shows HDP is listening to such a criticism, a Kurdish journalist close to the Kürdistani parties agreed:

> Yes, I think it is right to say such language initiatives show that HDP have developed a political maturity which listens and adapts their political strategy depending on the public criticism of them. This can also be seen in HDP's recent election campaign, where the party campaigned using a Kurdish slogan and the Kurdish language was generally at the forefront of their campaign (Kurdish journalist, personal interview 2019).

During such a campaign, the HDP's election slogan was "Ya Ma Ye", or "It is ours" in Kurdish. Such a slogan, which was a direct reference to the government's kayyum policy that replaced 95 HDP-run municipalities in 2016 in favour of government-appointed trustees, shows how HDP have attempted to draw in support from these Kürdistani parties and their constituents. Furthermore, due to the negotiations led by two HDP MPs, Imam Taşçier and Tayyıp Temel, the Kurdistan Election Alliance announced their participation in these elections. As Taşçier explains,

> We have been struggling for this for 10 years, but Kurds could never get together. Some of those parties were established in the 1960s or 1970s but couldn't unite. It's the hardened policy of the government that disregards the [Kurdish struggle] that brought us together. This is an important message to the Kurdish people. It will have a major effect in the elections. It is also a message to the government that it can't solve the problem by marginalizing and terrorizing Kurds (Al Monitor, 2019).

The alliance, which Demirtaş also announced his support from prison by announcing that the failure of Kurds until now to secure "their national unity to protect themselves against massacre" (Gazete Karinca, 2019). Thus, while HDP have been criticised for failing to address criticisms from Kurdish nationalists groups, have recently began to cooperate more fully with Kürdistani parties in the hope of helping create more unity within the Kurdish political field. One Kurdish HDP MP who I spoke with prior to the

announcement of the electoral alliance for the 2019 municipal elections, explained to me

the transition of HDP thought on such cooperation:

> It is a delicate subject – as a party, we have previously been reluctant to support such groups because we believed that it would aid the government's discourse that our party doesn't represent Kurdish interests, and therefore weaken us if a future peace process materialised. But considering the developments over the last 3 years, especially with regard to the attack on our cities and imprisonment of our members, there is a feeling that Kurds can now unite in a more thoroughly anti-government block. I think the conditions are now there, and from HDP's perspective, it makes strategic sense to work with these parties as it offers the possibility to capture Kurds who had previously voted for the AKP (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018).

Thus, in conclusion, it appears that HDP's recent cooperation with other Kurdish groups

shows the potential of a pan-Kurdish alliance incorporating the various political

traditions within Kurdish politics. While disagreements continue, with the smaller

Kürdistani groups accusing HDP of attempting to dominant them as a means to create

hegemony across Kurdish society, the party's recent alliances illustrates that they are

willing to incorporate such ideologies within their party structure. In this sense, the HDP

MP's belief that HDP is simultaneously a 'Kürdistani party' as well as a 'party of

Turkey' holds true.

7.4 Embracing differences: solving party tensions through agonistic pluralism

Much of this thesis has attempted to analysis the HDP by situating it within the context

of the political developments of the Kurdish movement and several Kurdish political

parties that preceded the establishment of the HDP. While research has tended to

consider HDP as a break from previous models of political organising on the part of the

Kurdish movement (Burç, 2018; Tekdemir, 2016; Sen, 2018), I have argued that there is

a surprising amount of historical continuity with the democratic tradition of pro-Kurdish parties that have materialised since the 1990s.

However, while this may be the case, there are a number of distinct characteristics of the HDP that separate it from its predecessors. Firstly, which has already been discussed, is in relation to the components of the party. While previous pro-Kurdish parties articulated a universalist political discourse as a means to attract the non-Kurdish electorate to their project, the party elites continued to be overwhelmingly represented by Kurds. To many, this may have been due to the fact that the Kurdish movement has been understood as a regional movement, or geographically delimited. That is to say that many non-Kurdish actors in Turkey interpreted the Kurdish movement as a nationalist movement relevant only to the regions populated by Kurds. However, with the establishment of HDP along with a range of Turkish Left groups, HDP have attempted to shift such an understanding of the Kurdish movement into a social movement that can influence Turkey as a whole.

In order to achieve such a transition from a regional movement in the Kurdish provinces into something more substantially 'national' in character, HDP have developed a broad alliance with diverse components that articulates their project of radical democracy as a point of affiliation between these groups. Furthermore, as I have just analysed, HDP's wariness of incorporating Kurdish nationalists of the Kürdistani variant can be seen as an attempt not to essentialize Kurdish identity over other alliances. Thus, the Türkiyelileşme project must be seen in this light – the transformation of a struggle with geographical delimitations into a project that truly becomes national in character.

However, while such a project is appealing on paper, it is quite hard to understand how the broad alliance of diverse components manages to successfully reach a consensus and avoids fragmenting into infighting. In order to understand this political project, Laclau and Mouffe may shed some light:

> The rejection of privileged points of rupture and the confluence of struggles into a unified political space, and the acceptance of the plurality and indeterminacy of the social, seem to us the two fundamental bases from which a new political imagery can be constructed (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p.136).

Unlike their predecessors, HDP have placed great effort in avoiding essentialising Kurdish identity and articulating the Kurdish conflict as limited to the Kurdish regions. Much like Öcalan's discursive transformation in the 2000s, HDP have attempted to expand the project to one encompassing the whole of Turkey and the wider Middle East. This political strategy, whereby the Kurdish conflict was not seen as a Kurdish anti-colonial struggle against the oppressive Turkish state, but rather as a struggle which relates to all minorities and counter-hegemonic forces in Turkey. This can be seen in HDP's articulation of the necessity for a peace process that will benefit the plurality of identities and cultures in Turkey: "HDP will work towards ensuring lasting peace and our future by creating a constitutional guarantee for all the different identities an cultures living together. The solution process will defend the will of coexistence [between identities] until the end" (HDP, 2015).[17]

Thus, rather than emphasising the need for peace for the benefit of Kurds, HDP emphasise the pluralities of Turkey as they attempt to incorporate the various identities

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[17] See HDP's 2015 manifesto: 'HDP, bütün halkların farklı kimlik ve kültürleriyle, anayasal güvence altında birlikte yaşaması, geleceğimizin ve kalıcı barışımızın sağlanması için çalışacak. Coğrafyamızdaki bütün halkların, çözüm süreci ekseninde daha da belirginleştirdiği birlikte yaşama iradesini sonuna kadar savunacak', HDP, *Büyük İnsanlık*, 2015 Seçim Bildirgesi (2015), p.12.

of Turkey into their movement. Such a perspective is further exemplified by the former

co-chair's definition of HDP as representing the "marginalised majority": "We are a

party representing all the neglected elements of Turkish society... When we incorporate

all these identities, we make up the majority of Turkey – this is why I call our party the

party of the marginalised majority" (HDP former co-chair, personal interview, 2018).

Therefore, the careful avoidance of essentialising Kurdish identity, and instead

using inclusive language that places the focus on Turkey's plurality, is very much in line

with Laclau and Mouffe's 'rejection of privileged points of rupture.' Furthermore,

according to these neo-Gramscian theorists the confluence of disparate struggles and the

acceptance of the plurality are considered the base in which a new political imagery can

be constructed. Thus, in this light, the former co-chair's use of the term 'marginalised

majority' can be seen as an attempt on the part of the HDP to create a confluence of

different voices that unites the disparate struggles within Turkey.

Laclau and Mouffe have been used to understand the confluence of different

voices within the HDP most thoroughly by Tekdemir. Tekdemir's central thesis rests on

the idea that HDP have attempted to instil an agnostic pluralism, which can be defined

as the legitimization and incorporation of different identities into a form of conflict-

informed consensus. Employing such a theoretical discourse helps to understand how

the party has managed to unite such a disparate group of political traditions:

> The HDP's radical plural democratic bloc has relied on two main political
> traditions… The East Side (regional) is an alliance of progressive Kurdish
> nationalists, including pan-Kurdish agents like secular NGO/parties, religious
> Kurdish Muslims and traditional tribes. The West Coast (macro) is an association
> of radical reformist democratic groups such as far-leftists, libertarians, social
> democrats, Alevis and other urban-based dynamic units like the

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environmentalists, religious minorities and anarchists. With all these components, this people's assembly is built through a logic of differences which is always open and incomplete as a coalition in an agonistic realm. The HDP has refused to essentialize itself in terms of a particular identity by, for instance, not labelling itself as a pro-Kurdish party but rather as a Kurdish-led party. This is different from traditional Kurdish parties such as the DBP and other alternative pro-Kurdish parties such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey (TKDP), the Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK) and the Rights and Freedom Party (HAK-PAR). In this way, the HDP has rejected a reductionist conception of politics and, therefore, has gone beyond the regional dimension of Kurdish perception through the discursive tools of 'Turkeyfication' and 'new life' by stitching together different social and political formations of society (Tekdemir, 2018).

Thus, according to Tekdemir, the stitching together of different political traditions of Turkey can be understood through the logics of differences that co-exist within the HDP. Conflict is articulated in a transparent and open manner where there is an understanding that different political traditions will lead to differing and sometimes competing political interpretations. Rather than avoiding it, the party places conflict at the centre of the party's identity, where it is constantly discussed, absorbed and understood through dialogue. Thus, HDP have "constructed a discursive struggle in diversity with the idea of the 'we are' as a collective will… the public space is constituted in a radical plural way where the conflict arising from the disagreement and opposition that takes place in Turkey's multiplicitous and polarized society is brought to the centre of democratic politics" (Tekdemir, 2018).

Such a collective construction of such a diverse range of struggles is in many ways an attempt by HDP to connect the multi-faceted intersection of struggles within Turkey. Within the party program, HDP have drawn in various struggles with regard to race, class and gender in order to provide an overreaching discourse that challenges the power and domination behind such structural inequalities. In this way, much in the

frame of the concept of the "marginalised majority", one MP within the party defines

HDP as a struggle from below that interconnects all forms of discrimination in Turkey:

> HDP focuses on the lower end of the hierarchies that are formed by structures such as Turk/Kurd and Sunni/Alevi. In this sense, our project is not on religious or ethnic terms, but more focused on the margins of society. If you only see Kurds in these margins, that is problematic in itself. Why can't all these margins come together? I think Türkiyelileşme is attempting to connect and develop the network of the marginalised voices of Turkey. In this way, our project is the intersectionality of politics – our alliance with different political actors isn't a question of arithmetic to pass the election threshold, but is something more organic: when you enter HDP, you risk your own boundaries and identity somehow as you engage and exchange with other identities and struggles. This exchange in itself makes the HDP a kind of school (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018).

One of the central differences that separate HDP from other parties in Turkey is the fact

that they don't have a fixed identity. While AKP, CHP and MHP can all be accused of

essentialising certain identities – AKP have essentialized the conservative Muslim

identity, while CHP and MHP have essentialized forms of Kemalism and Turkishness –

HDP have avoided such a trap. While the state has attempted to paint HDP as a Kurdish

party, rather than simply a pro-Kurdish party, HDP have resisted such essentialising of

political identities. The HDP MP, who entered the party from the Turkish revolutionary

SDP, also believes that the party doesn't have a mono-identity like the other parties:

> As a party, HDP are not a party that fights for majoritarianism – both with regard to obtaining power and in establishing a dominant identity that submerges sub-identities. By ending the peace process and establishing a war environment, the state hoped that it would split the movement into different groups that would lead to tensions arising. Such an unsustainable tension never materialized, our unity remained and we can still call ourselves a Kurdish party while simultaneously being a party of the Turkish progressives (HDP MP and former SDP leader, personal interview, 2019).

While this MP believes that no splits emerged within the party, crucially he

acknowledges the 'logic of differences' that Tekdemir claims underpins discussion

within HDP. He articulated such tensions through the use of a Turkish idiom, 'gerçekliklerin ışığına ancak fikir çatışması ile ulaşabilirsiniz', which roughly translates as 'true enlightenment comes through the debate of ideas'. Thus, he believes that the quarrels and debates of different political ideas within the party helps inform the party and allows for a productive politics to emerge. Such a phrase underlines how HDP interpret the differences that underpin the party's identity as a sign of strength, rather than a weakness that can be exploited by the state.

The Diyarbakir HDP MP defines such differences within the party as a form of productive tension. Rather than pursing a politics which antagonises the different political identities of Turkey, he believes the party offers a corrective to identity politics as every member has to directly engage with different identities to themselves:

> Within our party there is always this kind of productive tension, and the fact that we are internally pluralistic and inhabit an open-ended political space is what makes HDP distinctive in my view. This is vital for the party as there is a tense experimental space that we all try to occupy, to inhabit, and that space itself is also transforming our understanding of politics and society. So in this sense the HDP is an experiment, something entirely new in Turkey. Within HDP there are obvious ambiguities – to Kurdish people, Demirtaş is a true Kurdish leader. But when Turkish people look at him, they also see him as a true leader, but not necessarily Kurdish. So in this way HDP is a kind of focus of popular attention, and there are differing expectations. HDP is an experimental space where all groups can exchange with each other, negotiate their differences. And maybe they would like to define the character of the HDP, but I think that exchange, that tension is what defines the HDP (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018).

Thus, according to this MP, the tensions and differences that co-exist within the party is exactly what feeds the party. Such a cohabitation of different political identities allows for an exchange of knowledge that not only extends the party's reach strategically, but also informs the party's discourse. Such a perspective also helps explain HDP's hesitation to fully incorporate Kurdish nationalists into the party fold as such a

development has the potential to upset the balance of the various identities. As the MP

elaborates,

> The Kürdistani criticism of the HDP is we're too much a 'Turkified' party. But
> when you look at HDP from other parts of Turkey, they would argue HDP is too
> much a Kurdish party. This debate has been ongoing since the party's formation,
> where people have attempted to define the true nature of HDP. Such debates are
> yet to be resolved, and nor should they (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018).

Such a perspective helps understand the debate surrounding HDP and what identity it

subscribes too. While Kürdistani groups would like the party to become more fully

Kurdish, there remains an oscillation within the party where they are a Kürdistani party

to some voices, but more Türkiyeli to others. Furthermore, by not defining themselves to

a 'fixed' identity, such a productive tension allows for the constant reformulation and

emergence of a fresh political imagery. Likewise, it allows HDP to remain 'national',

thereby avoiding the geographical delimitation of previous pro-Kurdish parties. Such a

nation-wide reach of the party means they are continuously adjusting to the differing

expectations of multiplicity of political identities across the country.

Therefore, in conclusion, it is clear that HDP have built a party model which has

avoided the essentialising of identity or fixing themselves to a true party nature as a

means to adapt more fully to the multiplicity within Turkey's society. Throughout this

process, there have been constant pressures on the party to fix their identity more

clearly: from the Turkish state perspective, they have attempted to paint the party as a

Kurdish nationalist party in disguise, a tactic that may have influenced public perception

of the party but has failed to break the alliances within the HDP itself. Secondly,

Kurdish nationalists of the Kürdistani tradition have tried to shift HDP's identity

towards a more Kurdish identity. While HDP have responded to criticisms from Kurdish

nationalists by incorporating nationalist voices such as Imam Taşçier into the party fold as well as establishing electoral alliances with Kürdistani parties, the party have so fared resisted calls to change the party's essential nature.

In recent times, Turkish media has often attempted to draw attention to emerging tensions within the HDP. The narrative is usually characterised by rumours surrounding Demirtaş's ideological disputes with the HDP party, or regarding Kurdish nationalists frustrations with HDP's Türkiyelileşme agenda, but such representation of the party have often attempted to deepen divisions. As the Diyarbakir HDP MP explains, while such characterisations are hugely problematic as the media actively looks to weaken the alliances that have been formed within the party, it is not a concern for a party as such tensions are incorporated into HDP's political tradition:

> When we read such reports, all we can do is smile. Of course there are tensions of all kinds within the HDP; this is to be expected when we all come from different political traditions. But that is why we exist as a party, to negotiate such differences as a form of acknowledgement of the divisions that exist in Turkey. While the media points to such divisions, we actively attempt to resolve and negotiate these differences as a collective (HDP MP, personal interview, 2018).

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Dewlet bi ker be ji xwe le meke
- 'If the state is a donkey, do not ride him' – Kurdish proverb

My initial interest in investigating HDP's project of Türkiyelileşme stemmed from a fascination with understanding how a left-leaning party in Turkey with links to a militant organisation could somehow develop a political framework for incorporating a plurality of political subjectivities. In its simplest form, Türkiyelileşme can be seen as a project that attempts to construct an entirely new political identity, one that recognises and celebrates the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of Turkey. It offers a rich discursive approach to citizenship in Turkey through its emphasis on drawing attention to under-represented and marginalised political identities. However, constructing a political identity is difficult to accomplish, and such difficulty is heightened when there is such a clear structural and ideological proximity to the PKK.

This thesis has attempted to trace pro-Kurdish political activism in Turkey from the 1960s to the present day. In my own periodization, I have shown certain parallels between Kurdish activists engagement with Turkish socialists within TIP in the 1960s, HEP's alliance with the liberal SHP in the 1990s and the HDP's marriage between the Kurdish movement and the Turkish left. In each of these periods, pro-Kurdish political activists attempted to institute a political discourse that challenged the uniformity and fixed nature of Turkish identity through an emphasis on the pluralities of identity within Turkey. Alongside Turkish liberals and socialists, Kurdish activists fought against an essentialist understanding of Turkish identity, articulating a civic discourse that may

justly be called Türkiyelileşme avant la lettre. In this historical context, the HDP's

controversial Türkiyelileşme is revealed not as a simple response to Öcalan's democratic

discursive transformation in the early 2000s, but rather as a new and powerful

articulation of well-established Kurdish political strategy and ideology.

However, such periods of cooperation and inclusive politics have often been met

with a ramping up of state oppression by the Ankara regime – often involving a

coordinated effort by the parliament, judiciary and sometimes military – with the

unacknowledged goal of marginalising, delegitimising and weakening the inroads made

by pro-Kurdish party activism. Thus, the political pressures imposed on the HDP over

the last four years have historical parallels, and can be seen as an attempt to break the

'political will' and weaken the alliances formed between the Kurdish movement and

Turkish socialist movements. As part of its historical analysis of the Türkiyelileşme,

therefore, this thesis has highlighted the structural patterns of state coercion, while also

shedding light on new methods being pursued by the state.

While the 1990s was characterised by a continual process of banning pro-

Kurdish political parties, since the establishment of the BDP, the Turkish government

has chosen not to push for party-closures, preferring instead to prosecute party members

en masse. Both the KCK trials, charging BDP members en masse and embroiling them

in protracted legal struggles, as well as the recent pursuit of HDP members, were

intended to eliminate effective opposition and pacify the parties. My interviews with

HDP MPs confirm the success of this policy – in recent years, HDP have struggled to

sustain a credible resistance to the AKP. Likewise, since the failed coup, the imposition

of the kayyum (Ankara-appointed trustees to replace HDP mayors across the south-east)

is a further attempt to limit the effectiveness of pro-Kurdish party activism. As Chapter 4 emphasised, the success of HADEP in 1999 in securing municipalities had provided an institutional platform for pro-Kurdish parties to cement themselves more thoroughly in Turkey's political institutions. The policy of the kayyum should be read in this historical light.

However, an analysis of state coercion against pro-Kurdish party activism is difficult without addressing the relationship between such forms of party activism and the militant PKK. This has become even more pressing given the PKK's ideological transformation to democratic autonomy in the 2000s, which led to the development of a sivil görünümlü (civil outlook) aiming to engage more thoroughly with democratic politics. Francis O'Connor's description of the relationship between the two components of the Kurdish movement as one of "constructive ambiguity" is accurate; the shared reservoir of support is juxtaposed with clear structural differentiations. Despite the clear need to elaborate on this "constructive ambiguity", as observed in the literature review, there has been a tendency within academia to focus on the influence of the PKK on legal pro-Kurdish parties, which has in turn downplayed the significance of such party activism. This thesis has attempted to offer a corrective to this scholarly gap by highlighting the ideological interplay between HDP and a tradition of pro-Kurdish party activism that can be traced from the 1960s to the 1990s.

Beyond my historical analysis, this thesis has sought to contextualise and problematize the contemporary project of Türkiyelileşme. The concept is generally understood as a political strategy that aims to widen HDP's appeal to the non-Kurdish electorate, but this is an oversimplification. Türkiyelileşme must also be seen as the

crystallisation of disparate counter-hegemonic struggles that attempt to redefine and reconstitute Turkish conception of citizenship entirely. In Chapter 7, I elaborated on the concept of productive tension, whereby the party incorporates different political subjectivities as a means to provoke dynamic ideological discourse. Such a discourse challenges previous state-society relationships, and envisions a construction of a new, pluralistic state.

However, as Chapter 2 highlighted, there are crucial challenges that need to be overcome in order to accomplish Türkiyelileşme. The first challenge relates to the escalation of violence over the last four years: with the breakdown of negotiations and the prospect of peace retreating into the long distance, Kurds are psychologically exhausted. The success of HDP in articulating Türkiyelileşme in 2015 was quickly followed by the disappointment: the project failed to generate substantial solidarity for Kurds as they were sucked back into the sterile logic of war. Thus the discursive breakthrough promised by Türkiyelileşme failed to materialise.

The second challenge to Türkiyelileşme is a more ideological one, concerning Kurdish identity. The Kurdish movement has attempted to construct a dynamic political identity to strip Kurdishness of its more ethnicised nationalist origins. While Türkiyelileşme embraces a plurality of identities including Kurdishness, it utilises the Kurdish movement's construction of a political Kurdish identity. Identities and subjectivities are interpreted in purely political terms, and thus the project effaces the cultural emanations of identity. Thus, it demands that Kurds relinquish essentialized ethnic interpretations of their identity, and this explains the tendency for critics of Türkiyelileşme to cite cultural rights and threat of assimilation over political concerns.

Moreover, there is significant opposition to such an abandonment of this ethno-nationalist Kurdish identity: In Chapter 6, I characterised the militants' decision to engage in hendek çatışmaları (trench clashes) as reflecting a certain ethnicised reflex. Thus, HDP faces a significant obstacle in convincing Kurds, both within and outside the political sphere of the Kurdish movement, of the merits of embracing Türkiyelileşme and abandoning such ethno-nationalist interpretations of Kurdish identity.

A third challenge: the overwhelming tendency of party elites to defend the project, despite such concerns, and the broader productive tension that it entails, points towards a disconnect with the grassroots they are supposed to represent. While HDP continue to publicly declare their support for the continuation of Türkiyelileşme, the grassroots have called for HDP to return to their heartlands in the Kurdish-majority south-eastern provinces.

Recent initiatives suggest that the HDP have begun to do just that. Over the last few months, a number of HDP MPs and members have participated in a hunger strike to protest Abdullah Öcalan's isolation. The protest was initiated by Leyla Güven in November 2018, with one party official telling me privately that such a decision was made without informing the party. However, since then, thousands of Kurdish prisoners and dozens of HDP members have joined. This development suggests the HDP have loosened their insistence on promoting a Türkiyelileşme agenda and have returned to their ethno-nationalist roots. Such a radicalisation of their stance has meant that, rather than appealing to a broad cross-section of the Turkish electorate, instead they have focused on re-energising their core support among Kurdish voters.

However, this thesis has illustrated how an ethno-nationalism discourse is just one pole of the Kurdish movement, with the other one being the more pluralistic Türkiyelileşme. Depending on the levels of coercion exerted by the Turkish state, one pole is utilised over the other. HDP's recent radicalisation follows a historical pattern of pro-Kurdish political parties' responses to attempts of coercion by the Turkish state. When Kurdish parties move towards a more inclusive platform, state power is used to obstruct them; these parties then reorient their focus to their core regions and their ambitions are accordingly reduced. This shrinking of HDP's political space through an engagement with the hunger strikes – and the party's decision not to stand in western provinces in the recent March 2019 municipal election – has parallels with DEP's electoral boycott in 1994 and HADEP's focus on securing an electoral base in the south-east. In both cases, after their heartlands were re-energised, Kurdish party activism returned to a Türkiyelileşme agenda. Thus, the return to the heartlands strategy should not be interpreted as a clear discursive shift towards ethno-nationalism; instead, it is more of an established defence mechanism which is pursued for the self-preservation of the party. Given that Türkiyelileşme rests on the party's ability to shed their regionalist status, the shrinking and 'Kurdification' of HDP's political space is assuredly a reversal. Yet history suggests Türkiyelileşme will rise once more from the ashes.

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