THE SPATIAL IMAGINARY AND POLITICS OF DEMOCRATIC AUTONOMY:

A NEIGHBORHOOD ASSEMBLY EXPERIENCE IN BEYOĞLU

CANSU BAKAR

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Cansu Bakar

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This thesis has been approved by

Assist. Prof. Ceren Özselçuk
(Thesis Advisor)

Prof. Şemsa Özar

Prof. Nükhet Sirman

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Cansu Bakar, certify that

- I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have fully acknowledged and documented in my thesis all sources of ideas and words, including digital resources, which have been produced or published by another person or institution;
- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
- this is a true copy of the thesis approved by my advisor and thesis committee at Boğaziçi University, including final revisions required by them.

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Date 14.12.2015

ABSTRACT

The Spatial Imaginary and Politics of Democratic Autonomy:

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This thesis studies Kurdish Movement's Democratic Autonomy Project both in the ways that it is articulated in textual materials and materialized in the organizational forms of the movement, as well as in the manner in which it is undertaken and put into action in Hacıahmet neighborhood, Beyoğlu. I argue that the neighborhood assembly experiment/experience in a western city of Turkey differs from the ones in Kurdish cities particularly due to different relations with the space. Migration stories, longing for place of origin, relations with the city space, and attachments to the Kurdish community define the frames of local politics and bring about conflicting forms of engagements with the space. These conflicts lead the emergence of a space of struggle for both nation state and the Kurdish movement. I trace the implementations of the self-governmental project in Hacıahmet on the basis of daily encounters with the apparatuses of nation state. I also explore the shifts in discourse of the Kurdish Movement with a textual analysis. While the movement *de-centralizes* and transforms itself into a complex unity of organizations via horizontal interactions with other movements (left, gender, ecological, or geographically; Syria, Iran, Iraq) it also *de-centralizes* and *localizes* mode of politics with the inauguration of assemblies. The assembly proposes new forms of attachments with space, Kurdish community and also non-Kurdish communities by deconstructing existing centralized and vertical mode of doing politics and reconstructing new ones.

ÖZET

Demokratik Özerklik'in Mekansal Tahayyülü ve Siyaseti:

Beyoğlu'nda Bir Mahalle Meclisi Deneyimi

Bu tez Kürt Hareketi'nin Demokratik Özerklik Projesinin yazılı materyallerdeki ifade edilişini, projenin hareketin örgütsel formlarında cisimleşen biçimleri ve bunun yanı sıra Beyoğlu'nun Hacıahmet mahallesinde ele alınış ve eyleme geçirilme tarzını incelemektedir. Türkiye'nin batısında gerçekleştirilen mahalle meclisi deneyi(mi)nin özellikle mekanla kurulan farklı ilişkiler sebebiyle Kürt illerindekinden farklı olduğu ileri sürüyorum. Göç hikayeleri, memlekete duyulan özlem, kent mekanı ile ilişkiler ve Kürt cemaatine bağlılıklar yerel siyasetin biçimini tanımlar ve mekanla iştigalin çatışan formlarını üretir. Bu çatışmalar hem ulus devlet hem de Kürt hareketi için bir mücadele mekanının ortaya çıkmasına yol açar. Ben bu tezde öz yönetim projesinin Hacıahmet mahallesinde ulus devlet aygıtlarıyla gündelik karşılaşmalar ve çatışmaları temelinde uygulanışının izini sürüyorum. Aynı zamanda Kürt Hareketi'nin söylemindeki değişimleri metin analizi üzerinden mercek altına alıyorum. Hareket kendisini *merkezsizleştirip* diğer hareketlerle (sol, toplumsal cinsiyet, ekolojik veya coğrafi olarak Suriye, İran, Irak) yatay etkileşimler aracılığıyla kompleks bir birime dönüştürürken, aynı zamanda meclislerin işe koşulmasıyla hareketin siyaset yapma biçimlerinin merkezsizleştiğini ve yerelleştiğini iddia ediyorum. Meclisler var olan merkezi ve dikey siyaset yapma biçimlerini yapı sökümüne uğratarak ve yeniden yapılandırarak mekanla, Kürt cemaatiyle ve Kürt olmayan cemaatlerle yeni bağlanma biçimleri tasarlıyor.

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to the brave children of Cizire

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, my concern is to study the Democratic Autonomy project proposed by Kurdish Liberation Movement. The "autonomy project"[1] is required a deeper analysis due to its appearance as a new proposal that claims to change the direction of politics in Turkey via both defending the communities against the bureaucratic and centralist nation state and proposing to construct new self-governance mechanisms. In order to concretize my discussion, I will look at a neighborhood assembly organization in Beyoğlu, İstanbul.

I take the Democratic Autonomy as an important project through the discussion of which new dimensions of Kurdish politics can be comprehended. In this discussion, I look at the shifts in the discourse of the movement, in the organizational model of Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, in the strategy of the party; and the implementation of the project in a particular neighborhood in Beyoğlu, Hacıahmet neighborhood. Thus, rather than prejudging and dismissing this new spatial experiment because it sounds unfamiliar or unviable, or rejecting it because it is formulated by actors[2] one may not want to be associated with, I attempt to comprehend and depict the new ideas (such as "democratic republic", "democratic confederalism", and "democratic nation") proposed and experimented by the movement. I think, the most intriguing among these ideas is the Democratic

[1]Since my informants have used the terms "Democratic Autonomy project" and "Autonomy project" interchangeably, I follow their path and use both of them.

[2] By actors, I refer both to Abdullah Öcalan and Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan.

Autonomy project which have changed the course of the Kurdish politics and forced the other actors (such as state officials) as well to come up with a new vocabulary.

What is mainly proposed by Democratic Autonomy is a scaling up of self governance structures from the local (neighborhood and village communes) to the city, region, nation and confederation (DTK, 2012; Gürer, 2015; Akkaya & Jongerden, 2013, Küçük & Özselçuk, forthcoming 2016). And, in this restructuring, neighborhoods become the smallest, and the most important, spaces upon which a new imaginary of governance is constructed. Due to this attempt of redefining the relations among the various spaces (such as neighborhood, village, city, or region), I take the project as a "spatial utopia". It is a utopia because it locates a quite challenging project that has possibility to challenge the existing imaginary of politics (centralized, vertically organized formation) and locate this challenge into the centre of its politics; and it is spatial because it attempts to redefine the conceptualization of space and locality via prioritizing the relationality among territories and dwellers. The project proposes a reformulation of spatial concepts which strictly opposes to the conceptualizations of the existing nation state mechanisms, such as local governance and municipalities. Thus, what we have encountered, then, can be summed as a new struggle over spaces. There are two different ways of struggle, either preserving spaces via abiding the status quo or redefining spaces with new Democratic Autonomy framework.

1.1 Theoretical premises of the research

I draw on especially the scholarly literature of critical geography and political theory. The critical geography constitutes a theoretical background to my discussion of

autonomy. However, if we don't take this literature without the discussions of radical democracy and social movements, the project of the Kurdish Liberation Movement cannot be conceptualized. Thus, I try to read these debates concurrently since this appeared as a necessity due to the discussions I came across in my field research in Hacıahmet neighborhood. In order to elucidate the discussions in the following chapters, I would like to define some of the core debates that constitute the foundations of this thesis.

1.1.1 Autonomy

The notion of "autonomy" is quite a new notion for understanding the politics in Turkey. It is both new and challenging because it points to an alternative; a new form of politics as opposed to the traditional state formation in Turkey. Until now, as claimed by Çetin Gürer (2015), democratic autonomy is seen as a separatist strategy,[3] as a project for the expansion of responsibilities of local government or regarded as an authoritarian model (Akyol, 2014). In other words, the autonomy project has not been discussed much by the people outside of the Kurdish movement. However, the Kurdish Liberation Movement takes the Democratic Autonomy as the constitutive paradigm both for the solution of the "Kurdish Question" and the democratic restructuring of Turkey. Due to these big claims that I will take to be a challenge to the existing nation state formation, it needs further analysis. In order to elaborate more on how and in what ways it challenges the existing state formation, I prefer to look at the different conceptualizations of the notion of autonomy in

[3] For further examples, you can look at Kurubaş, 2012; Tavukçu, 2011.

political science literature and how it is theorized and realized by the Kurdish Liberation Movement.

In the political science literature, the definition of autonomy is discussed under two different frameworks. Whereas the first approach is related with the definition of autonomy on the basis of liberal framework, the second approach evaluates the notion within the radical democratic framework (Gürer, 2015, p. 27).

In the first approach, autonomy is discussed as a possible option of solving the conflicts caused by the lack of collective rights. It questions the ways of solving the problems of, for instance, political non-representation of minorities or ban of education in mother tongue within a democratic framework (Benedikter, 2014; Kymlicka, 1996). The theoreticians of this approach scrutinize the possibility of different communities' living together and peacefully within the same country. However, they provide several answers. For instance while Jürgen Habermas (1999) claims that the problems regarding the different communities' living together is the lack of collective rights for populations that are defined as minorities. He claims that different communities (different in the sense of language, culture, religion or ethnicity) can live peacefully within the same country if the state expands its definition of individual rights because the protection of individual rights secure also the collective rights. And, if the rights are preserved, there will be no need to change the formation of the nation state; in other words, no need for autonomy. Kmylicka (1996), on the other hand, does not take individual rights as the "protector" of the collective rights. Rather, he takes autonomy and share of authority as a preferable way of preserving the collective rights of minority groups, or communities other than dominant ones.

The second approach, on the other hand, concentrates on the radical democratic models of autonomy. These models are mainly about the self governance practices and reconstruction of economic, social and political realms. Occupy movements, indigenous movements, urban and environmentalist movements can be taken as some of the examples that focus on the total restructuring of the existing way of doing politics (Escobar, 2010; Hardt & Negri, 2009; Holloway, 2005; Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006). In this radical democratic formulation of autonomy, practices point to the beyond of the mere critique of the nation state; they come up with the construction of alternative models. Thus, this formulation of autonomy is taken as an alternative to the fundamental structures (such as representative system, pre-dominance of private property) created by the bourgeoisie society. Informed by these two perspectives, I claim that autonomy conceptualization of Kurdish movement benefits from both of the discussions, but it insists predominantly on the reconstruction of the social with a palpable reference to the radical democratic discourse. I will conceptualize the autonomy mostly referring to the second line of thought due to the party's particular emphasis on seven dimensions:[4] direct democracy, self governance mechanisms on the basis of assemblies and communes, defense of society against the state, solidarity based alternative economic models, demands for new de-colonial practices rather than a separate state, environmentalism, and gender equality (DTK, 2012, p. 16). These founding pillars of Democratic Autonomy can be conceptualized in relation to the debates of radical democratic theory in which "various democratic struggles against different forms of subordination" are acknowledged and located in a chain of equivalence (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. xviii). The project aims to maintain an equivalent relation among

[4]In the interviews it appeared that the number of the dimensions changes from six to eight. Thus, I take the explanation of DTK (Demokratik Toplum Kongresi) into consideration.

different struggles that will constitute a counter hegemonic bloc under this new definition of autonomy.

1.1.2 Space/Place

Since I claim that the Democratic Autonomy is a project mainly basing itself on the re-definition of space, it is necessary to develop a discussion of "space" in order to depict what is new about their conceptualizations and how it is differed from the conception of state space. In this discussion I mainly draw on the works of Henri Lefebvre (1991, 2009), Doreen Massey (1994, 1999, 2005), John Agnew (1999), Stuart Elden (2004, 2007), Edward Said (1993), John Allen (2003), David Harvey (2000), Derek Gregory and John Urry (1985), Edward Soja (1989, 1999), Christian Schmid (2008), Thomas Gieryn (2000) and so on. What I suggest in bringing these different names together is that they provide a framework for new insights to understand the characteristics of space. Informed by these writers' discussions, I suggest categorizing four characteristics of space. First one is space as a social product. Rather than thinking space as a taken for granted entity, I will try to read space as a social product referring to the discussions mainly developed by Henri Lefebvre. Secondly, in critical geography literature, space is conceptualized as a political construction. Space which seems homogeneous is produced in a political way on the ground of power relations. As Lefebvre states, there is a politics of space because space is "political and ideological" (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 170). Thirdly, spaces are taken as areas of various forms of confrontations. In other words, spaces are political and social therefore they are considerably conflictual (that will be exemplified by the everyday conflicts among the state and inhabitants). The forth and the last one is the emphasis made on the space's being a relational phenomena. The

discussion centering on these four characteristics of space enables me to elucidate on the two main and considerably different perspectives on locality that I reached with the help of my interviews: the approach of the state and the approach of the Kurdish movement. The approach toward space by the local governance mechanism of the nation state, municipality, and the Kurdish movement will be differentiated from each other in relation to the importance they give to the relationship between the spaces and the inhabitants.

While the "territorial state", as it is called by the geographers, has conceptualized topographies as merely geographical areas or "things" which can be controlled and dominated, critical geographers such as Massey takes space mainly as a product of interrelations, the sphere of possibility of existence of multiplicity, and a processing system, never a closed system (Massey, 2005, pp. 10-11). These theoretical discussions are quintessential for the discussion of the Democratic Autonomy due to the fact that they open up a space for imagining a different form of relationality among spaces and people. In fact, I will be claiming that this literature facilitates a relationality based definition of space and enables us to conceive how ties among different geographies are constructed with this relationality based definition of space/place.

Another significant field that I ground my discussion of space in this thesis is the debates on the conceptualization of space and place within the critical geography literature. There are mainly two groups who position themselves against each other. The first group differentiates space and place from each other. The space is equated with "the land, sea; with the earth which stretches out around us". Space, in this perspective, is taken as a surface, a "continuous and given" surface (Massey, 2005, pp. 4-5). On the other hand, place is described as the terrain which is shaped by the

everyday and lived experiences. The second group, however, dismisses the separation of these two notions. They re-conceptualize both space and place in terms of social relations, rather than taking space as an abstract concept. In other words, they reject the binary of abstract space versus concrete place. In my thesis, I use space and place interchangeably via following the second strand of thought because I reject the separation of everyday and non-everyday. And, as Massey(2005) claims this separation confines place into local-global binary in the side of local. I aim to rethink the notions of local, locality, spatiality, and "sense of place". As Arif Dirlik (1999) states "against the either/or approach to questions of place and space, it is necessary to reintegrate the two in the new reorganizations of space-from below" (p. 179). My discussion on space/place will aim at realizing this reintegration.[5]

1.1.3 Social movements

Since the field work of the thesis is about an assembly formation, it is necessary to look at the new social movements literature which provides examples on different forms of horizontally organized "assemblies". With a brief analysis of the debate on new forms of emancipatory politics, I try to position the assembly formation developed by the Kurdish Movement within this debate since I claim that it brings about a different definition of assembly that goes beyond the horizontal-vertical binary based debates of social movement literature (Prentoulis & Thomassen, 2013).

Against the repressive nation state formations, representative institutions, and national and global capital, new actors with new social, political and economic imaginaries provide different perspectives regarding the emancipatory politics of

[5]For further discussion: Dirlik, 1999; Fenster, 2005; Gieryn, 2000; Massey, 2005.

today. The foregoing conflicts and quandaries of egalitarian emancipation today are grouped under two main debates in political theory: horizontal multitude and politics of hegemony.[6] The works coauthored by Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, Empire (2000), Multitude (2004), Commonwealth (2009), and Declaration (2012) are the main references for the first approach.[7] They mainly discuss the autonomous, participatory and non-representative forms of politics in our times. They focus on the principles and promises that the emancipatory movements hold out for "an effective renewal of democracy beyond the neoliberal order of capital and decaying representative institutions" (Kioupkiolis & Katsambekis, 2014, p. 4).

In other words, they favor non-statist and non-representative forms of democratic politics which criticizes and dismisses vertical power relations and leaderships. In this line, theoreticians take as their object a multitude that collaborates equally and directly in horizontal networks. The multitude is proposed as an adequate concept for a politics of emancipation in which hierarchical structures with centralized leadership are no longer effective. They identify these new lines of doing politics as non-hegemonic and egalitarian self activity.

The second group, on the other hand, tries to re-define the concept of hegemony and seeks to reconfigure the notions such as sovereignty, leadership, state, power and antagonism. The main theoreticians are Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau with their important work of Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Rather than non-representative networks of autonomous multiplicities, the struggle of popular blocks that impose their sovereign will is the centre of their debate. They

[6]Look at the various discussions in: Kioupkiolis & Katsambekis, 2014.

[7]John Holloway (2005), Manuel Castells (2012), and Saul Newman (2014) are also taken as the important theoreticians of this perspective.

acknowledge the ineradicability of antagonism and hegemony in the constitution of society, thus come up with an emancipatory politics imaginary which bases itself on the revival of the concept of hegemony. As opposed to the "multitude" that constitutes itself as a horizontal multiplicity capable of making decisions and taking actions without being directed by a hegemonic force, theoreticians in this frame of thought discuss the hegemonic construction of multiplicity through the political construction of chain of equivalence among various groups.

This debate on the "subject" of collective movements today is quite important for our discussion of the Kurdish Liberation Movement since the movement makes a different emphasis that combines these two frames of thought. The new assembly formations taking place in neighborhoods or squares are mostly discussed under the headline of "new social movements" where what is emphasized is the leaderless and party-less form of organizing.[8] However, in our case, although the assembly formation has similarities with the experiences of "new social movements" in terms of the openness to the participation and aim to challenge the representative system through bottom up organization of assemblies, the neighborhood assembly of the Kurdish Liberation Movement maintains strict ties with the party and the leader. Thus, this formation challenges the debates which take movements with leader as "vertical" organization. In the Kurdish case, as I will be claiming, the boundaries between horizontality and verticality are blurred. The assemblies in our case have founded itself on the intersections of different forms of horizontality and verticality. Although the assembly formation in terms of openness to participation and non-hierarchical positioning in the organization has similarities with the model proposed by those in the first strand of thought, I think the assembly experiment of Hacıahmet

[8]For different examples from Greece, Spain, or parts of Latin America: Peruzzotti, 2005; Özer, 2013; Razsa & Kurnik, 2012; Jiménez and Estalella, 2013.

neighborhood is more related with the construction of a counter-hegemonic bloc with the creation of temporary or permanent alliances among various groups. Thus, I try to show how the construction of these alliances are discussed and organized in Hacıahmet via challenging horizontality-verticality binary.

1.2 Field and method

This thesis is based on an ethnographic research in Hacıahmet neighborhood, Beyoğlu. In my ethnographic research, I used various qualitative research methods such as interviewing, focus group interviewing, and participant observation. I visited the neighborhood (it is hard to quantify), the headquarter and the district office several times (at least six times), and participate in some significant events (such as celebration of Newroz, a wedding, openings of election offices both in the local governance and presidency elections, march for the celebration of Rojava, and so on) between February 2014 and May 2015. Moreover, the participant observation provided by ethnography helped me to deepen my analysis about the neighborhood. During my research, I made 13 interviews and 2 focus group interviews. It is important to note that almost all of my interviewees are over 40 years old It is significant to state this fact since it affects the trajectory of my discussion of migration, in relation to the issues of sense of belonging and the desire to go back to the homelands. As I will be showing in Chapter 3, the age group that I conducted interviews has a particular conception of "homeland" that informs their narratives of migration.

Besides interviews, I spent quite some time in the neighborhood which enriched my knowledge about everyday in the neighborhood with the help of the

everyday chats I made with the activists and "mothers" (abbreviation of Peace mothers used by Kurdish movement) in Hacıahmet Park.

I believe the ethnography as a method provides an important viewpoint in studies on communities by enabling us to witness the everyday experiences. Rather than asking questions and leaving the neighborhood, the ethnography allows for deepening the relations with the neighborhood inhabitants and activists. In fact, I sometimes became a friend with whom "intimate" discussions could be made regarding the party, organization or family matters.

When I first started to make interviews in the neighborhood, both the activists in the neighborhood and colleagues of mine couldn't understand why I especially wanted to focus on a neighborhood in Tarlabaşı rather than going and researching a place in the Kurdish region. I was eager to make a research in Istanbul because I wanted to analyze and depict how a Democratic Autonomy project, as a (Kurdish) regional project, was being implemented in a western city of Turkey where there was no municipality to support the movement's new perspectives on the politics of the local.[9] Therefore, I wanted to show how the Kurdish movement organizes itself outside of the Kurdish region under a new pluralist model of Democratic Autonomy, how its relation with Kurdish region is maintained, how the complex relation between a neighborhood in the city and region affects the organizational practices in Istanbul, and how this new pluralist attempt is transmitted to "others" who have no relations with the Kurdish National Movement. To put it differently, the reason for me to choose this neighborhood was to analyze the "paradigm shift" of the

[9]Although there are not many studies on the neighborhood assemblies due to the fact that it is a recent organizational practice in the process of being established, existing researchers look at the assemblies in Kurdistan probably because it is easier to organize under a municipality of pro-Kurdish party (Sümer, 2012; Tuncel, 2013).

movement, a shift from a nation based separation model to a radical democratic form of autonomy, in the cities outside of the Kurdish region.

Besides being a "field" upon which a new organizational model is tried to be built, Hacıahmet neighborhood is also important due to its location in Tarlabaşı. The studies taking Tarlabaşı as a research field mostly concentrate on the topics of migration, poverty, integration to a global city, or urban renewal projects and their impacts (Dinçer and Enlil, 2002; Sakızlıoğlu, 2007; Yılmaz, 2003). Rather than these commonly encountered perspectives on Tarlabaşı, I would like to introduce it as a new "space of hope", a lab for a new pluralist project of Kurdish Movement.

Hacıahmet Neighborhood is located in Beyoğlu district, specifically between Tarlabaşı and Dolapdere. It is one of the specific neighborhoods in Beyoğlu due to its high population of Kurdish residents. Within the boundaries of Beyoğlu district, there are also Bülbül, Çukur and Yenişehir neighborhoods which are very close to Hacıahmet. These four neighborhoods together constitute, so to speak, a kind of "Kurdish island". Besides, this region is distinctive, now, due to the location of both the headquarter of HDP (Halkların Demokratik Partisi)[10] and the Beyoğlu office (HDP Beyoğlu) in Tarlabaşı. To put it differently, Beyoğlu is the centre of the party, and the district tries to make local politics in this centre-locality mixture.

Although I was aware of the fact that both centre and district offices are located very near to Hacıahmet, I didn't at first understand the scope of the influence of this co-existence on the discussion of "locality". The effects of the co-existence of two offices have mostly changed the direction of my discussions in the thesis

[10]People's Democratic Party was founded in 15 February, 2012. It is an "umbrella" organization that brings together various socialist parties, socialist organizations, feminists, women organizations, LGBT groups, and the Kurdish movement. It is a kind of coalition, an alternative bloc that centers its politics on emancipation of women, equality of non-Turks and Turks, etc.

because whenever I attempted to focus on the locality, my questions were limited and shaped by the dominance of the "centre", and more broadly by the Kurdish regional politics. These everyday confrontations (between the centre and the local)[11] change the direction of my research in two ways: First, I needed to include a discussion of local governance because every activist tries to position herself and the activities she engages in as the "opposite" of local governance conceptualization of AKP government. Second, in order to comprehend the interpretations of the Democratic autonomy at the local level in Hacıahmet neighborhood, I felt the need to focus more on the macro or regional relations, their impacts on locality, and provide a new definition of the local. In short, it was a challenging experience because the field forced me to think twice the discussions I have thought before regarding the neighborhood and reformulate them according to the particularity of Hacıahmet.

I made the first interview as a pilot interview with one good friend of mine working in Beyoğlu HDP.[12] He introduced me to two other women from Hacıahmet and, with a snowball sampling; I reached the rest of my interviewees. In total I made 13 interviews both with activists, inhabitants or AKP members in the neighborhood. I also made two focus group interviews, first with a group of 8 women; and second with youngsters in the neighborhood. Since I made the second one in a coffee shop with a male friend of mine who knows Kurdish, the crowd got bigger via reaching almost 12 people. Since I was introduced by a party member, I didn't have problems in reaching other interviewees. Yet, what was difficult in this research practice has been to maintain the distance between being a researcher who needs help for her thesis and being a "comrade". I didn't want to separate these two positions from each

[11]I don't claim that centre and local are binary phenomena. Rather, as I will show in the following chapters, they co-exist and shape each other in several ways.

[12] The names of informants will remain anonymous during the thesis.

other, that's way I collected 2 or 3 hours long interviews that included both complaints to a "comrade" about the party and answers to a researcher's questions. The most compelling thing, however, was neither my in between position nor the long hour interviewing; but the political agenda of Turkey. While witnessing the war in Kobane was solely hard which was hardened with the loss of friends, witnessing the brutal attack of Islamic State (IS) against YPG/J forces within the neighborhood in which people's memories of war and forced displacement were very fresh, was very challenging for me. I claimed that I prepared myself to study in a neighborhood consisting of people who struggled very much against the state terror (both in 1990s and during the KCK cases).[13] However, when the particularities of the neighborhood are added to my grief of watching a war, writing this thesis sometimes became unbearable.[14]

1.3 Overview of chapters

In chapter 2, I focus on the *de-centralization* experience of the Kurdish Liberation Movement in Turkey along two axes: de-centralization in the form of party organization and de-centralization in the political strategy of the party from claiming an independent nation state to building a democratic republic. In this part, I make a discourse analysis via looking at the defense texts of Abdullah Öcalan and party congress reports in order to show these two forms of transformations toward

[13] Thousands of people who had any affiliations with the Kurdish movement were accused of being part of "illegal terror organization" (that is KCK) that has the aim of separating the country and founding a new Kurdish state. The operations were started at April 14, 2009 and more than s7000 people were arrested. In the period of 30 months, 7748 people were put under custody and 3895 were detained in KCK case (Aktaş, 2012).

[14] While I was trying to edit the thesis, after the June 7 elections, the peace process started between the Turkish state and PKK in 2013 was suspended and the war started with all of its terror. While the Kurdish region was brutally attacked, the HDP activists were also started to be harassed. This political assault of the state affected the neighborhood of Hacıahmet and 8 activists were arrested under the charges of separatism in August 15, 2015.

decentralization. I tried to depict the changes in the party formation and strategy because I think "decentralization" has two meanings. One is the expansion of the centre and appearance of multi centers that can be followed from the discussion within the party regarding its transformation from a party to "party complex" that proposes to organize different parties in other parts of Kurdistan (in Syria, Iraq and Iran). In this chapter, I use de-centralization as a form of distribution of power centre and authority. I relate this transformation to the general "paradigm shift" observed within the National Liberation Movements in other parts of the world. It is a shift from, using a Gramscian term, "becoming a state", armed struggle for an independent nation state, towards different forms of living together such as Democratic Autonomy project. Within this brief retrospective, I define the new notions proposed by the movement such as democratic nation, democratic republic, democratic modernity, democratic confederalism, and so on that will facilitate the discussions in the following chapters. I will look at how the party's relation with centre and spatiality is reformulated in such a way that a different spatial imaginary regarding Turkey is conceptualized under the project of Democratic Autonomy.

In chapter 3, I look at the local implementation of the second dimension of "decentralization" in which decentralization is taken as a form of self-governance via analyzing the neighborhood assembly of Hacıahmet neighborhood. In my interviews, it appeared that there is confusion in the use of the notions of local governance (yerel yönetim) and decentralization (yerinden yönetim) due to the fact that in Turkish these two concepts resemble each other phonetically. However, the everyday encounters explained in the interviews point to the drastic differences among the two forms of spatial imaginary: imaginary of the nation state (exemplified by the municipality, local governance) and imaginary of the Kurdish movement

(exemplified by the neighborhood assembly, decentralization). I will provide a comparative analysis of the spatiality imaginary of local governance (a state space) and neighborhood assembly (communalist space). Informed by the theoretical discussions (on space mainly) and interviews, I claim that the new spatial imaginary under assembly formation paves the way for imagining links between different spaces via putting relationality at the centre of its space discussion. However, as a critique to the critical geography literature, I will not conceptualize the state space as a space devoid of any emphasis on relationality. Rather, I will focus on how different actors and groups have different relationships with the spaces. How the imaginary ties between different geographies are made possible and what kind of locality the assembly of Hacıahmet brings about are the core questions I discuss in the chapter.

In chapter 4, I analyze the novelties coming with this new form of spatial definition that signifies the relationality among space and people. I mainly concentrate on the notion of "local politics" due to the Kurdish movement's emphasis on "locality" in their new political project of autonomy. Whereas the neighborhood assembly formation is discussed by the party as a mechanism through which the locality would be the center in the autonomy project, its realization in Hacıahmet neighborhood is controversial due to the complexity of relationships between the centre and the local; or between macro politics and local politics. Since local politics merely does not define the discussion of politics in Hacıahmet due to the dominance of the regional politics, I try to redefine the political framework under the notion of "localization of macro politics". Within this discussion, I analyze the following questions: how does the belonging to the Kurdish region affect the local politics? What is the relationship between locality and belonging? How does the movement approach to locality in a place outside of the Kurdish region? I come up

with two forms of belongings: belonging to a locality and belonging to an ethnic community. And, as the second one precedes the first form of belonging, "how the movement achieves to translate project's ethical, social, and political principles to other societies" emerges as an important question to think about.

With all the questions and theoretical discussions in mind, this new decentralization attempt of Kurdish movement can be read as a novel imaginary as opposed to the existing governance model and preconceived notions such as state, nation, democracy, and governance. However, it is a quite hard task to realize. As J.K. Gibson – Graham (2008) abandon "the ontological privileging of systemic or structural determination", they agree with Massey (2005) about the fact that it will be quite hard to remake the world. As Gibson & Graham (2008) put,

> We cannot ignore the power of past discourses and their materialization in durable technologies, infrastructures, and behaviors. Nor can we sidestep our responses to those both within and beyond our place who have suffered for our relative well being. But we can choose to create new discourses and counter-technologies of economy and construct strategic forms of interplace solidarity, bringing to the fore ways to make other worlds possible. (p. 11)

This thesis, then, can be taken as an attempt to show how a movement tries to make "other worlds possible" via not only changing itself, its mechanism and discourse; but also make "others" to think about being a part of that change in spite of all conflicts, antagonisms, and hardships.

CHAPTER 2

TWO DIMENSIONS OF RADICAL TRANSFORMATION: "DE-CENTRALIZING" THE PARTY AND REDEFINING THE STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the de-centralization attempt of Kurdish Liberation Movement in Turkey along two axes: de-centralization in the form of the organization of the party and de-centralization in the strategy (of the party) for social transformation from an independent nation state to "democratic autonomy". I will make a discourse analysis of Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Workers' Party of Kurdistan) via looking at the defense texts submitted to various courts by Abdullah Öcalan, and party congress documents. With the help of these analyses, I take the party as a body through which we can analyze the social and political transformations towards de- centralization at two levels. One is the textual level that articulates the changes that the party needs to follow (it is both an obligation and a proposal). It is a transformation narrative which I deduce from the texts and which points to the inevitability of the organization of decentralized assemblies. The second one can be conceptualized as the level of practical transformation that opens up the question of how these texts are interpreted and practiced in real life with the help of various mediators. However, in order to elaborate on the second level of the transformation, in this chapter, I will focus on the first part where the main aim is to comprehend the content of the texts and the shifts proposed at the textual level.

The discussion of de-centralization began in 1990s as we can see in the documents of the party. At the end of the 1990s, the ongoing discussions pointed to a drastic change in the strategy of the party: a change from the war for a separate state to a radical democratic politics with a new claim of de-centralization of the nation state. This change can be read as a certain revelation of the "paradigm shift" experienced in 1990s by the national liberation movements in different parts of the world.[15] It is a shift from demanding a separate nation state to the scrutiny of the state itself.[16] This shift becomes the main determinate in the political line of the Kurdish Liberation Movement.

In the defense texts of Abdullah Öcalan and the congress reports of the party, particularly two things can be taken as indicators of the changes in the party form and party politics. Firstly, the party reorganized itself via mostly transforming the existing mechanisms. The names given to these replaced or changed mechanisms of the party, I think, manifest a shift parallel to the changes in the strategy of the party such as not using "party" or "army" but using "congress", "community", or "unity of people" and promoting organization of different mechanisms in other parts of Kurdistan.[17] The party reorganizes itself with a different imaginary of spatial

[15] In 1990s, there is a rise in the "democratization" process in different places such as Guatemala, Chile, Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia and so on. In that period, multiculturalism, populism, and autonomy entered into the agenda of the movements. For a historical background, you can look at: Özbudun, 2012.

[16] There was a strategic communality among the national liberation movements in terms of struggling for an independent nation state especially influenced from the thoughts of Lenin (1968) between the years of 1950-1970 (Öcalan: 2012). Although the emphasis on colonialism and a struggle for anti-colonialism were maintained within the movement until the years of 1990s, the dissolution of Soviet Union and collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe have played roles in changing the demand for "independent socialist state" (Güneş, 2013, pp. 233-4). Also look at: Manafy, 2005; Öcalan, 2012; Özcan, 2012; Van Bruinessen, 2000.

[17] The Kurds use the term "colony" in order to point to the situation they are struggling against or "international colony."(Beşikçi, 2014) The main borders are the Turkish state in the north (North Kurdistan-Bakur), Iraq in the south (South Kurdistan- Başur), Syria in the west (Western Kurdistan-Rojava), and Iran in the east (East Kurdistan- Rojhilat).

organization; it turns into a “party complex” via promoting the organization of different parties by the Kurdish communities under the rule of different nation states, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Secondly, I will look at the new discursive field developed by the movement referring to the radical democracy and pluralist discourse. Through explanation of the offered concepts such as “democratic nation”, I endeavor to show strategic and programmatic changes that the party underwent. It is important to note that, the organizational changes and the transformations in the programmatic of the party are not separate things, in fact, they change simultaneously.

All of the discussions can be taken as the historical background of the de-centralization discussion made by the Kurdish Liberation Movement which is crystallized under the project of Democratic Autonomy that promotes the confederation of democratic autonomous assemblies.

2.2 The “paradigm change” and its implications on Kurdish Movement

Hegemony, in Gramscian sense, is the “practice that shapes a national-popular collective will in its efforts to become state through wars of position” (Arditi, 2007, p. 17). In these wars of position, the party is conceptualized as the Machiavellian Prince whose role as political leader is to “conquer a state or to found a new type of state” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 253). And, in this logic, working class, through the intellectual and moral leadership of the Communist Party, constructs a counter hegemony that supplants the bourgeoisie.

The theorization of hegemony with an attribution to a certain class leadership position and the thesis of “becoming state” widened the horizon of socialist politics and national liberation movements in 1960s and 1970s. This process was

accompanied with the revolutionary experiences worldwide such as revolutionary processes in Vietnam, Cuba or Algeria (Gültekingil, 2014, pp. 536-43). It was the period in which "founding a state" became the ultimate aim of the national liberation movements (Öcalan, 2012, p. 278; Güneş, 2013, pp. 233-40). The Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan is one of these national liberation movements which aimed to consolidate its counter- hegemonic power with a political strategy devoted to founding a separate state starting from its foundation in 1978 until 1990s. However, the dissolution of socialist states pointed to a necessity; a different form of conceptualization of politics. The reformulation of politics was necessary in order to develop a framework parallel to the multiplying of struggles and social actors (Öcalan, 2012).

By seeing this necessity, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) reformulated the hegemony discussion of Gramsci in 1980s and related it to the changes they analyzed in the worldwide revolutionary experiences. They mainly reclaim the use of the concept of hegemony in a manner that breaks its ties with the *essentialism* regarding the designated subject of emancipatory politics, working class. By essentialism, I refer to two dimensions deconstructed by Laclau and Mouffe: essentialism under the guise of economism and essentialism of the transcendental subject as seen in class reductionism to the subject of working class (Arditi, 2007, p. 18). In their critique of essentialism of economism and class-reductionism, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) claim that the whole conception of socialism is in crisis since it "rests upon the ontological centrality of the working class, upon the role of Revolution, with a capital 'r', as the founding moment in the transition from one type of society to another, and upon the illusory prospect of a perfectly unitary and homogeneous collective will that will render pointless the moment of politics" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 2). For them, the Left is witnessing

the dissolution of that political imaginary because the plurality of contemporary social struggles has given rise to a theoretical crisis. And upon this theoretical crisis, they locate their analysis by re-introducing the concept of hegemony, albeit, in the same move, reformulating it. They resort to the notion of hegemony because it presented itself as a "contingent operation" (p. 3).

With their reconceptualization of hegemony, what they do is to update the socialist politics for "the complexities of a democratic and pluralist setting" (Arditi, 2007, p. 18). In other words, what they theorize can be taken as a post-Gramscian reading of hegemony that is governed by contingency. Instead of using the general contradiction between the bourgeois and working class as a principle of explanation for oppression, rebellion, and change, they saw the necessity of theorization of hegemonic alliances that sought to construct "chains of equivalences" between different social groups and political identities (Newman, 2014, p. 95). In this radical democratic discursive field, there is a multiplicity of identities and social movements- ethnic minorities, students, feminists, LGBTQ people, environmentalists, and so on- which cannot be subsumed under the category of working class. Although they propose the radical democratic politics as the political strategy, hegemony continues to be a core element of any social movement and collective project for radical change. In other words, the counter hegemonic bloc is still seen as the determinate force that strives to impose its sovereign will. In fact, this time we see a counter hegemonic bloc that is established with the help of temporary alliances made among different groups (p. 97). Since the hegemony is a "project of power, a project which aims to take over a position of power" (p. 98), plurality of struggles, position and identities construct a counter hegemonic bloc, this time, not necessarily with the leadership of the Machiavellian Prince.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985), then, analyzed and conceptualized the shifts experienced by the Left. I think, Kurdish Liberation movement, in our case, is the one of the clear examples through which the changes can be followed.[18] As Öcalan (2012) discusses, when Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan was established as a political party in 1978, it had a classical Leninist party type organizational structure, with a general secretary as the leading party official and an executive committee. And the main political strategy, in line with the national liberation movements, was to establish a state.[19] "To become a state was regarded as the unique form" as Öcalan (2012) says because of the fact that all national liberation movements came up with a separate state formation (p. 278). However, the failure of real socialism and the "fate" of national liberation movements changed the course of the Kurdish movement. The shift from war of positions to radical democratic politics was taken into the agenda of the movement. What is now proposed is not "becoming a state" with a war of positions against the hegemonic power of the state. Rather, the movement comes up with a project of Democratic Autonomy that puts the enquiry of the state formation at its centre; and calls various social groups and movements to construct alliances, or a "hegemonic bloc", against the nation state formation. The project of democratic autonomy appears as "a new methodology that weds decolonization and national liberation with a strong critique of the state form" (Küçük & Özselçuk, forthcoming 2016, p. 2).

[18] By being inspired very much from the experiences of radical left in Turkey in 1970's, Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan was founded as a Marxist Leninist party (van Bruniessen, 2000, pp. 231-4, 242, 250). Until the year of 1995, the party had hammer and sickle in its flag. However, the change of the flag via removing the hammer and sickle doesn't mean that the party left its Leftist tone. As we will see, the party changed its discourse via keeping loyal to the ethics and politics of the Left.

[19]The movement especially looked at the examples of South Africa and Vietnam (van Bruniessen, 2000, p. 231). For a deeper discussion, look at: Öcalan, 2012.

The radical change from "becoming a state" to de-centralization with the project of Democratic Autonomy has two main impacts. First one is related with the party formation. This change implies the necessity of the re-organization of the existing bodies that will be in line with the radical democratic discourse. This change in the party formation also affects the spatial imaginary of the party. Rather than thinking within the boundaries of the nation state of Turkey, the party enlarges the scope of its emancipatory politics in the organizational level via promoting the organization of different parties in different parts of the Kurdish region, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

Secondly, the programmatic of the party has changed. The party, at first, aimed at reversing the hegemonic power structure via waging war against the nation state starting from the places where the hegemonic power does not have so much control. However, starting from at the end of 1990s, the party proposes a "project" of democratic autonomy rather than a strategy of war.[20] The radical democratic discourse analyzed by Laclau and Mouffe is, in a way, dialectically realized under the project of Democratic Autonomy.[21]

[20] Even this change of the concepts can be taken as a representation of the paradigm shift experienced. Rather than the concept of "strategy", a Leninist conceptualization, now the notion of "project" is used (in the party documents and reports) in order to explain their political agenda.

[21] I don't claim that the autonomy discussions in Kurdish movements started with the democratic autonomy project. As we think broadly via including the histories of Kurds in Iraq, Iran and Syria, is can be stated that there are various discussion on this autonomy theme. Autonomous Mahabad Kurdish Republic founded with the declaration of Qazi Muhammad, for instance, is taken as the first trial of autonomous governance by Kurds. Although PKK did not take into consideration the Mahabad Republic of Iran in the years of party's foundation, a statement of Abdullah Öcalan in 1998 shows that the Mahabad was started to be embraced as a "Kurdish federation model" within Iran in 1946 (Yeşil, 2012; Vali, 2003). Similar to the democratic autonomy discussions, the Republic is read as a sign "under which Kurds live their lives as resistance and struggle… the persistence of their struggle is the expression of their unfulfilled desire for freedom" (Vali, 2011, pp. 137-8).

2.3 Preliminary discussions of transformation toward multiplicity

In 1998, the members of the party and Abdullah Öcalan claimed that there was a need for reconstruction and reorganization of the party related to the conjunctural changes in the Middle East and Turkey.[22] Following the year of the commencement of the discussions in 1999, an important event had experienced; the arrest of the leader of the party, Abdullah Öcalan. For a party which had strictly defined rules and form of leadership, the arrest of the leader while the party was holding its sixth congress resulted in a shock and despair ("Uluslararası komplo", 2000). This sudden change of the situation resulted in an emergent call of another congress, the seventh congress of the party in 2000. In line with the defense submitted by Öcalan prior to the congress, the party decided to discuss political - military changes and reconstruction of the party structure including the existing bodies. It is these signs of shift in the party politics and mechanisms and, in a way, the sign of "democratic turn" that differentiate this congress from the previous ones.

The first defense of Öcalan signaled the oncoming changes in the discourse of the party. The ideas explained in the first defense in 1999 were elaborated more in the following defenses in 2001 and 2004 which were submitted to ECHR, European Court of Human Rights.[23] As he stated in his first defense,

> The option of democratic solution is the only solution for the Kurdish question. Separation is neither possible nor necessary. The interest of

[22]The historical background can be followed by looking at the thick defenses of Abdullah Öcalan (2012). As Güneş (2013) claims the emphasis of democracy and organizational transformations started with the third unilateral ceasefire of PKK in 1998 (p.243).

[23] His defenses were published in various languages such as Kurdish, English, and German. The defenses submitted to the Turkish Courts are published under the names of Declaration on the Solution of the Kurdish Question and Urfa: The Symbol of History, Divinity and Wretchedness in the Basin of the Tigris-Euphrates. The other defenses submitted to the ECHR were published in three volumes. These are chronologically named as From Sumerian Clerical State towards People's Republic I-II (2001), The Defense of Free Man (2003), and Defending a People (2004).

> Kurds is absolutely tied to the *democratic unity* with Turkey. If the Democratic Resolution is applied properly, autonomy will become more successful and realistic model than federation. The practice has already proceeded in this way. (Güneş, 2013, p.255)[24]

The emphasis on democracy and insistence of a peaceful resolution became important dimensions which entered the agenda of the party. As the quote clearly shows, the "solution" for Kurdish question can only be maintained, according to Öcalan, with the reformulation of existing form of doing politics. And, the novel form prioritizes not the foundation of a separate state, but a form of "democratic unity" that will propose a form of living together.

2.4 Reorganization of the "party"

In line with the "modest call for peace" of Öcalan (2012, p. 390), the seventh congress of the party was held in 2000 with the participation of almost 400 deputies ("Uluslararası komplo", 2000). As it will be discussed at length, it is the congress which paves the way for us to understand the "foundations" of Democratic Autonomy. Similar to the first congress of the party, it is taken as a new beginning, a foundation congress with the emphasis on peace;

> In our party history, what is similar to the 7th extraordinary congress is the foundation congress, the first congress…. The 7th congress also carries the characteristics of foundation congress. It is the congress of the new period and new party line. In the congress, we will discuss the problems related to the party line and practical issues. It will also realize

[24] Demokratik çözüm seçeneği genelde olduğu gibi Kürt sorununda da tek seçenek durumundadır. Ayrılma, ne mümkün ne de gereklidir.Kürtlerin çıkarı kesinlikle Türkiye ile *demokratik birlik*ten geçmektedir. Demokratik Çözüm hakkıyla uygulanırsa özerklik, federasyondan bile daha başarılı ve gerçekçi bir model olma yolundadır. Pratik daha şimdiden bu yolda ilerlemektedir. (Güneş, 2013, p.255)

> strategical and tactical changes. In this respect, it is a quite important congress.(“Uluslararası komplo”, 2000)[25]

The “re-birth” of the party with the reconfiguration of the "party line" also points to a necessity of organizational changes in addition to the “strategic and tactical changes”. Existing form of military structure that consolidates itself around attack rather than defense and the applied methods were re-evaluated by the party. As it is discussed in the seventh congress,

> Our congress evaluated the long term practice of armed struggle and confirmed the fact that it played a great role in the national democratic progress. On the basis of that, the congress confirmed the party leadership’s decision of the termination of the armed struggle. Accordingly, *democratic political struggle* is adopted as the new struggle form of the new party strategy that is forced by the internal and external developments.(“Olağanüstü 7.”, 2000)[26]

Then, the party sought to build a new discursive space with the inclusion of the discourse of democracy which was accompanied by the transformation in the military struggle. As discussed by Akkaya & Jongerden (2011), the politico-military organization of the party changed its approach from a classical people’s war aimed at a military defeat or retreat of the state army from Turkish Kurdistan, towards an approach aimed at a political settlement (p. 144). As the party publications demonstrate, the form of military struggle was discussed and evaluated at length. As it is explained in the party documents,

> It was decided to repeal the organizations of ARGK and ERNK that was accomplished their mission accordingly to the past strategy. In place of

[25] Parti tarihimizde 7. Olağanüstü kongreye benzeyen 1.Kuruluş Kongresi vardır…7.kongremiz aynı zamanda bir kuruluş kongresi özelliğini taşıyor. *Yeni dönemin veyeni çizgi*nin kongresi oluyor.Bu kongre çizgi sorunlarını, bununla birlikte pratik sorunları tartışacak çok önemli stratejik ve taktik değişiklikleri gerçekleştirecektir.Bu açıdan oldukça önemlidir. (“Uluslararası komplo”, 2000)

[26]Kongremiz uzun süre temel taktik olarak uyguladığımız silahli mücadele gerçeğini de çok yönlü olarak değerlendirerek, ulusal-demokratik gelismedeki rölünü büyük ölçüde oynadığını tespit etmiş ve bu temelde parti önderliğimizin silahli mücadeleyi durdurma kararını teyit etmiştir. Bu doğrultuda iç ve dış gelişmelerin zorunlu bir gereği olan yeni parti stratejisinin temel mücadele bicimi olarak, *demokratik siyasal mücadele*yi her alanda uygulamak üzere benimsemiştir . (“Olağanüstü 7.”, 2000)

> them, People's Defense Forces and Kurdish Democratic People's Union (KDBH) is organized. The congress also decided to establish *legal democratic struggle* and its mechanisms in Turkey; and organizations in other parts of Kurdistan in relation to their conditions. ("Gecenin karanlığında", 2000)[27]

The party took the re-formation of existing bodies, ARGK (Arteşe Rizgarîya Gelê Kurdistan- People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan*)* and ERNK (Eniya Rizgariya Netewa Kurdistan- National Liberation Front of Kurdistan) at those times, as a necessity. The party claimed that the particular conditions in different localities necessitated the establishment of new organizations. In line with the discourse of "democratic struggle", the party promoted the organizations in different localities. I would like to read this emphasis and following changes as the preliminary steps of multiplicity in terms of diversification of mechanisms and parties. I also argue that the locality emphasis of the party (with the promotion of placed based organizations) opens up a space for the *spatialization* of the party via breaking its centralized organizational form, in other words both multiplying units of the organization and transforming the structure of the party itself.[28]

Replacement of the old mechanisms with new ones and change in the names of the existing bodies of the party and military structure appear as important dimensions in my attempt of creation of a de-centralization story. While it was possible to change the structure without touching the names, why did the party also change the names of the bodies several times? I find this question significant because

[27] Geçmiş strateji içinde temel işlevlerini tamamlayan ARGK ve ERNK örgütlenmelerinin aşılması gerektiğine karar verilmistir. Bunlar yerine Halk Savunma Kuvvetleri ve Kürt Demokratik Halk Birliği (KDBH) oluşturulması; Türkiye'de *yasal demokratik mücadele* ve bunu yürütecek örgütlenmelerin yaratılması; diğer parçalarda da koşulları temelinde ulusal demokratik mücadele yürütecek oluşumlara gidilmesi kararlaştırılmıştır. ("Gecenin karanlığında", 2000)

[28] Parties in Iraq named PÇDK (Parti Çareseri Dimokrati Kurdistan- Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party) founded in 2002, in Iran named PJAK (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistane- Party of Free Life of Kurdistan) in 2004, and Syria named PYD (Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat- Democratic Union Party) in 2003, and guerilla forces related to these parties can be taken under this diversification (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2012, pp. 165-6).

the answer implies the clues through which we can make sense of the grand changes in terms of military organization, politics and structure of the party.

Simon Critchley (2014) argues that what is at stake in political organizations and politics is *naming* of political subjects and then getting organized politically around that name. As he continues, "the logic of political nomination consists in identifying a determinate particularity in society and then hegemonically constructing that particularity into a generality that exerts a universal claim"(pp. 91-2). So, Kurdish movement's quest for different nominations is not independent from its programmatic shifts. The continuous changes in namings point to a shift in their "universal claim", a claim of decentralized governance.

As a first example, let's take the dissolution of the army front structures of ARGK, and the formation of new one called HPG (Hêzên Parastina Gel – the People's Defense Forces). In line with the congress reports in which the party defended the necessity of change in the use of military means, the "army" was replaced by "defense force". While ARGK and ERNK were functioning as executive bodies of the party, new party politics required a change in the functioning of the bodies. What strikes my attention most in these transformations is the use of "people" (halk), and peoples (halklar) later on, which I would like to read as a sign of change toward a different imaginary regarding the community formation. The party started to change the names of the organs or form new ones by choosing names which mostly include "unity" (birlik) and "society" (topluluk)[29] which I think was in line with the new democracy discourse that emphasized plurality and particularity of communities rather than homogeneity and supremacy of one nation over others.

[29] It can also be translated as "community".

As another example, we can look at the change from ERNK to YDK (Yekitiya Demokratik a Gelê Kurdistan-People's Democratic Unity in Kurdistan). The phrase "unity of people", was started to be used in the new organizations which can be read as the representation of a shift from a discourse of war to democratization of the nation and unity of people. However, this time the ethnic community began to transgress the boundaries of the nation state via pointing to a bigger community including Kurds in Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

Related to the discussions of the seventh congress, in the eighth congress, held in 2002, the party announced the foundation of a new organization named KADEK, (Kongreya Azadî û Demokrasiya Kurdistan - Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress). The constant structural changes forced the party to restructure itself which resulted in the formation of KADEK:

> ..... the movement identifies itself with the name of PKK since the date of 27 November, 1978. After twenty four years of struggle, the movement decided to re-define itself with a new name on the basis of the new program and code, and a new organizational system. ("8.yeniden", 2002)[30]

The party decided to repeal PKK and to replace it with KADEK. This decision, I think, is quite essential for our discussion of de-centralization because it implies a sort of "de-centralization" of the party form itself. Even if these two organizations, PKK and KADEK, had the same political agenda, the differences between the names mean a lot. Rather than a vertically organized party formation, the movement decided to use a form of *congress* in order to "democratize the societies of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria" (Güneş, 2013, p. 262). Although this aim of democratizing the parts of Kurdistan was valid for both the party and congress, what differentiate them

[30]… hareketin 27 Kasim 1978'den itibaren kendisini PKK adıyla tanımlaması temelinde gercekleştirdiği 24 yıllık mücadele ardından 8. kongremizle birlikte kendisini yeni bir program ve tüzük temelinde yeni bir adlandırmaya, yeni bir örgütsel sisteme kavuşturmaya ve bu temelde yeniden tanımlamaya oturmuştur. ("8. yeniden", 2002)

is the name, the idea of "multiplicity" and a certain critique of one centered organizational structure (proposal of de-centering the organization, spreading the centre and working with "centers" rather than one solidified centre) coming with it. In addition to that, I think, the transformation toward KADEK is worth to mention, although it didn't last long, because it opens up a space for the discussion of the *spatialization* of the party: spatialization in terms of valorizing different localities. I do not take de-centralization as a form of loosening the ties with the space. Rather, I think de-centralization takes its power from the relationships it develops with different localities via dispersing the unique centre. The empowerment of the relationship with various spaces and localities enriches the formation of a decentralized structure via breaking the strong ties with a certain center. The center under scrutiny, in our case, is the Kurdish region in Turkey (Bakur) and its dominance over other parts in Syria, Iraq and Iran.

With this move of de-centralization and spatialization, the space for the establishment of different organizations in different parts of the Kurdish region (including Syria, Iran and Iraq) was opened. So, the other parts of Kurdistan under the rule of different nation states will get organized and gather under the same roof, which was named Koma Civaken Kurdistan (Association of Communities in Kurdistan- KCK).[31] The party, in a way, became more than a party, and turned into a "party complex" claimed by Akkaya and Jongerden (2013). Next to the cluster of parties in different nation states, the party established various institutions through which coordination of political practices could take place.

One of them is founded in 2003 and named Kongra-Gel (Kongra Gele Kurdistan- People's Congress of Kurdistan) ("8. yeniden", 2002). Like KADEK,

[31]Koma Civaken Kurdistan is a network of village, city, and regional councils. It is both the concept embodying the idea of democratic confederalism and societal organization presented as an alternative of the nation state formation (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2013, p. 166).

Kongra-Gel also grounded its politics on the principle of *democratic solution* ("KONGRA-GEL demokratik", 2003, p. 4). With the foundation of Kongra-Gel, the party turns into a more complex body with a different aim, bringing various components under a particular mechanism named the Association of Communities in Kurdistan. Kongra-Gel is the people's front of the party that can also be thought as a legislative body. As Akkaya and Jongerden (2011) discusses, PKK "which controlled all fields of activities, was replaced by a *congress* of organization that was to coordinate, not rule, different parties and organizations in the party complex"(p. 148). And, this process of reformation of the party form was accompanied by the discussions of Democratic Confederalism that is proposed as a way of uniting those different geographies of Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey via expanding the boundaries of nation states (p. 150).

At that point I would like to elaborate more on the notion of "party-complex" used by Akkaya and Jongerden (2013). They claim that the reorganizational shifts in the party organization led to the organization of different mechanisms, bodies or parties. These multiplied bodies were gathered under different associations (such as KCK or pan-Kurdistan congress, the National Congress of Kurdistan, KNK) that tied four separated parts to each other. Until that time, it is claimed by various writers and accepted by the members of the party that PKK was regarded as the main decision maker (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2013; Öcalan, 2012). Akkaya and Jongerden (2013) named this multiplicity of bodies as "party-complex". As they put, "over the years, the PKK grew more diverse, and what we refer to as the PKK today is actually a party-complex, a formation of parties and organizations comprising several parties including the PKK as a party" (p. 165). However, rather than using the concept only to show the multiplicity of mechanisms, I use the notion of "party complex" in

relation to the de-centralization discussion, changing relations with any kind of centre. Thus, instead of referring merely to the multiplicity of organizations, I use the notion as an indicator of the spatial character of the transformation. The parties are multiplied but this multiplicity is accompanied by the empowerment of the relationships between the localities and mechanisms. This new spatial imaginary brings about the scrutiny of the formations of the centre, nation state, borders, territory and so on. Therefore, I claim that the notion of "party complex" is a good representative of how the parties are "spatialized" while their ties with a particular centre have come under question.

Kongra-Gel, that is an assembly of Koma Civaken Kurdistan, deepened some of the discussions that were started by the party members. Besides the emphasis on confederation and strengthening of "national unity (ulusal birlik)", organization and empowerment of women became significant areas of struggle compatible with the pluralist discourse adapted (Anonymous, 2004; Güneş, 2013, p. 267). The emphasis on the women's autonomous organization within the party is the topic discussed at first in the sixth congress. I think since it is an area which requires a deep analysis on the gender issue, it is beyond the discussion of this thesis. However, it is important to look briefly at the changes in the women organization within the movement as well since the position of women and their equal positioning with men become, later on, as one of the cornerstones of the Democratic Autonomy project. And, I think, the gender equality emphasis is the topic which differentiates Kurdish movement from any other democratizing discourses and emancipatory politics developed in Turkey.

As we can see in the party documents, the strengthening of women's movement[32] accompanied the discussion on KADEK. The reorganization discussions

[32] I don't use the concept of feminism on purpose. The women in the party differentiate their struggle from feminism via not disregarding the commonalities and similarities. However, for the movement's

went along with the proposed transformations in the position of women both in the party and in the communities of Kurdistan. This led to the organization of a women's party named Partiya Jina Azad (Free Women's Party, PJA) in 2000. In 2004, it took the name of Partiya Azadiya Jin a Kurdistan (PAJK). Besides, one of the most distinctive military organizations, and first women army of the world, named Yekitiyen Jinen Azad STAR (Unity of Free Women- YJA Star) was organized (Güneş, 2013, pp. 267-8). The repositioning of the women within the party complex can also be read as an important part of the transformation process that the party has undergone (Kocabıçak, 2015; Demir 2014).

In a nutshell, between the years of 1999 – 2005, the PKK and following organizations held many congresses. While putting these organizations one after another, I am not attempting to propose a linear line of change and development for the party complex. All of these changes in names and reorganization of organizational and military bodies, for me, tell the story of de-centralization and indicate a shift towards multiplicity and re-distribution of authority. It can be read as a form of de-centralization due to the fact that the "power centre" of the movement is claimed to be dispersed. The establishment of new organizations has paved the way for the critique of the state form and patriarchal capitalist modernity within the party itself. In other words, form, the party, and the content, democratic discourse with the critique of state and patriarchy, are transforming each other simultaneously.

2.5 Reformulating the strategy: From "becoming a state" to Democratic Autonomy

As I am trying to show the steps towards the claims of de-centralization, I find important the elaboration of the multiple concepts developed by the party complex.

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discussion on the women's position, we should look deeply into the discussion of "Jineoloji". For further discussion see Özgür Kadın Akademisi, 2015.

The notions taken for granted by the nation state are tried to be replaced by novel ones which deconstruct the existing loaded concepts like the “republic” and the “nation”.

The party proposes various conceptualizations through which the decomposition of the existing nation state can be reached, at least at the discursive level. Fundamental concepts highly possible to encounter in the documents are basically democratic nation, democratic republic, democratic autonomy, and democratic modernity. Rather than discussing all concepts at length separately, I would like to concentrate on the notion of “democratic nation” which can be taken as the “umbrella” concept under which democratic modernity and democratic autonomy can be dealt with, and of “democratic republic”. I choose to focus on these two notions due to the fact that they can be read as the cornerstones of the new imaginary, which I interpret from the texts, regarding the decomposition of the existing nation state formation and reformulation of an alternative mode of governance, a self-governance model. “Democratic republic” is the notion which directly speaks to the nation state and proposes various re-organizations (democratization steps) of the structure of the nation state. “Democratic nation”, on the other hand, is more related with the imaginary of a new community formation and political bodies to realize this imaginary. What I will, in short, try to depict is the decomposition of the existing nation state formation both with the introduction of new conceptual and political practices and novel use of the language.

2.5.1 Democratic Republic

In addition to the changes in the nominations, we see that a new language and a novel discursive space are created with the inclusion of the word of “democracy”

into the party line. Invention of new concepts valorizing the concept of *democracy* began to appear in the seventh congress with the introduction of "democratic republic". As it was discussed in the party congress,

> It seems impossible to win our struggle without proposing a program that will base itself on the contradiction between the system and the Kurdish community and oppressed people of Turkey in cities'. It needs to be a program that comprises all Turkey and the Northern Kurdistan. *Democratic Republic* program fulfills this need. This approach started with Imralı defense, that had its roots in our history, will be the main understanding of the new mass struggle.("Gecenin karanlığında", 2000)[33]

The discussion of "democratic republic" and the program developed for its realization, like the Peace Project called Democratic Unity of Middle East ("Gecenin karanlığında", 2000) can be read, retrospectively, as the first steps of the discussions of de-centralization with the introduction of new conceptualizations. This proposal of reconstruction of existing governance formation can be read as one of the first projects proposed by the party not only just for the people of Kurdistan, but for all communities in Turkey. Democratization of the republic via "exceeding the oligarchic characteristic of it" (Güneş, 2013, p. 260) is quintessential in order to create a chance of living together within the same country. As the party states,

> ... against this oligarchy it is necessary to develop a reconstruction movement on the basis of *democratic liberation* and *democratic republic* that will save all rank and files (workers, civil servants, women, peasants and all middle class) from oppression and exploitation.("7. kongre", 2000)[34]

What is proposed is to unite different segments of the community via redefining the "republic" of Turkey with an inclusive manner, not prioritizing one community over

[33] Metropollerdeki Kürt halkı ile Türkiyeli ezilenlerin düzen ile çelişkilerini esas alan, tüm Türkiye ve Kuzey Kürdistan'ı kapsayan bir program ileri sürmeden kazanmak fazla mümkün gözükmemektedir. *Demokratik Cumhuriyet*programı, tam da bu çerçevede bir niteliktedir. İmrali savunmaları ile başlayan ancak geçmisimizde de kökenleri bulunan bu yaklaşım yeni dönem kitle mücadelesinin temel anlayışı olacaktır. ("Gecenin karanlığında", 2000)

[34] Bu oligarşiye karsi bütün halk kesimlerini - isçileri, memurları, kadınları, köylüleri tüm orta kesimleri - baskı ve sömürüden kurtaracak bir *demokratik kurtulus* ve *demokratik cumhuriyet* temelinde yeniden kuruluş hareketinin geliştirilip gerçeklestirilmesi gereklidir. ("7. kongre", 2000)

the other, namely Turkish citizens over "other" nationalities. The overlapping of the "re-birth" of the party with the seventh congress and the proposal of democratic republic is quite interesting. It is because of the fact that while the party was discussing the reconstruction of its existing political military bodies and discourse, it also attempted to force the state to do the same thing, that is, to transform itself. And, this transformation requires the redefinition of the present conceptualization of the "republic".

The party has a complex relation (mainly due to the multiplicity of actors) with the existing state formation. The party states that,

> Our party, today, has succeeded to reach our people living on four parts of Kurdistan and most of Kurds in Diasporas. Thereby, the Kurdish people, for the first time, reached an organizational level shaped by common spirit and collective consciousness. In this process of organization, our party goes beyond being a party with this process level and created mechanisms. Thus, the main mechanisms existed in a state is created for a community without a state. ("PKK hareketi", 2000)[35]

The state like organization of the party and the state are concomitant. While the party was changing its paradigm which was accompanied by the re-formation of the present party form and mechanisms organized under it, it also attempted to reverse the power relations between the party and the state. It is the party which comes up with new conceptualizations regarding the existing nation state formation and, I think, challenges the language of the state by providing a new framework that takes as its premise multi-centrality and heterogeneity. To put it differently, while the party complex is trying to formulate new models of governance and de-centralization, it also threatens the discursive space of the nation state via interrupting the hegemonic

[35] Partimiz bugun Kürdistan'in 4 parcasinda yasayan halkimiza ve yine yurtdışında bulunan Kürt kitlesinin büyük çoğunluğuna ulaşmış durumdadır. Böylece Kürt halkı tarihinde ilk defa ortak bir ruh ve kolektif bilinçle bu ölçüde gelişkin bir örgütlülük düzeyine ulaşmıştır. Partimizin bu mücadele sürecinde ortaya çıkardığı gelişme düzeyi, yaratılan örgütsel mekanizmalarla birlikte bir parti olmanın ötesine geçmiş, böylece devleti olmayan bir halk için bir devlette bulunabilecek bütün temel örgütlenmeler önemli ölçüde yaratılmıştır. ("PKK hareketi", 2000)

narrative of the state. In order for the state to answer the party complex and the autonomy it demands, it has no other language than the one provided by the party complex. In other words, the state officials, now, use the concept like democratic autonomy in their explanations even though they would denounce the projects because the existing nation state formation does not have appropriate notions developed so far. The state has been more focused on the "indivisible unity of the country", homogeneity or centrality, rather than thinking about the reformulation of governance system.[36] I find this important in order to depict the space opened up by the party complex in its discussion of democratization of Turkey.

2.5.2 Democratic Nation

In order to reconceptualize the republic and state, the components of it should also be redefined. The notion of the "nation" appears as an important constituent of the democratic autonomy project. However, why does the party need to keep the concept of the "nation"? This is an important question because it points to the relation between the nation state and national community. As an explanation of the use of democratic nation, they are stating that

> Democratic nation is the common society that is established by free people and communities with their free will. The force behind the democratic nation is the freewill of the people and groups who decided to become a part of the same nation. It is the statist nation definition that defines the nation on the basis of language, culture, interest and common history. And this conceptualization cannot be generalized. In other words, it cannot be taken as the absolute nation conception. (Öcalan, 2011, p. 10)[37]

[36] We can look at the news about autonomy (autonomy always in quotation mark). For example, see http://www.ensonhaber.com/bitliste-ozerklik-ilan-eden-hdpli-baskan-tutuklandi-2015-08-20.html

[37]Demokratik ulus, özgür birey ve toplulukların öz iradeleriyle oluşturdukları ortak toplumdur. Demokratik ulusta birleştirici güç aynı ulustan olmaya karar veren toplum birey ve gruplarının özgür iradesidir. Ulusu dil, kültür, pazar ve ortak tarihe bağlayan anlayış

The new definition of "nation" can be taken as an attempt of changing the language. Rather than proposing a totally different term for the discussion of nation, the party uses a very loaded term, "nation". I think, this can be read as an attempt to create a counter hegemonic space with the reversal of meanings attributed to certain concepts. The movement aims at redefining the capitalist hegemonic space defined by *Turkishness* and a strict definition of a particular form of the nation. The transformation is targeted with the deployment of the same existing language of the nation state via undermining the dominant meanings and replacing them with new meanings emphasizing multiplicity. Rather than a strict definition of a nation, we have encountered with an open space for definitions of various nations. What is distinctive and different from the nation state definition is new democratic nation's openness to the diversity in terms of language, ethnicity, culture, and history. Each community has a different language, cultural background, and understanding of history. And the nation is constituted with the participation of these different communities and individuals with their freewill. So, the term of nation is kept, but it gains a different meaning. The conception of nation still connotes a kind of belonging. However, in democratic nation, this is not a kind of national belonging defined by the nation state; but a form of belonging to a community with freewill. So, it is a kind of freeing people from the existing national ties and valorizing the capacity of each individual, capacity of making decisions.

As Gellner (1983) argues a certain form of "cultural and linguistic homogeneity has served.....as a functional imperative for the states" (p. 42). This constitutive element of the nation state is the point where the party complex develops

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devlet ulusunu tarif eder ki genelleştirilemez. Yani tek bir ulus anlayışı olarak mutlaklaştırılamaz. (Öcalan, 2011, p. 10)

its redefinition of heterogeneity of the nation. While democratizing the term, it proposes a new project of "nation". The conceptualization of present nation and nationhood is criticized and tried to be replaced by another form which will not glorify one community over another. As it is explained, "(t)he notion of *democratic nation* that is not defined on the basis of strict political boundaries, one language, culture, religion, history narrative, means cohabitation of free and equal citizens on the basis of solidarity" (Öcalan, 2011, p. 10).[38]

With a re-conceptualization of the concept of nation, nation is defined not as a homogenized community, but on the contrary an ensemble of communities with their particularities. What is necessary to focus on I think is the separation of constructed relationship between the nation and state. Rather than the relation between *nation* and *state*, the party now proposes to empower the relation between *democracy* and *nation*. What we witness is the fact that concepts are redefined in such a way that there is no need for even the use of the word of the "state". In other words, while the terms of republic and nation are kept, the notion of state is eliminated in their novel discourse. As against to the nation defining itself on the basis of state, we see that they keep the concept of nation but overlaying it with new meanings.

> While it is the nationalism that defines the statist definition of the nation, it is freedom and solidarity consciousness in democratic nation. As the nation of the state is about the homogenized society, democratic nation establishes itself on the ground of different collectivities. It takes differences as richness. (Öcalan, 2011, pp. 10-11)[39]

[38]"Katı siyasi sınırlara, tek dile, kültüre, dine, tarih yorumuna bağlanmamış demokratik ulus tanımı; çoğulcu, özgür ve eşit yurttaşlarca toplulukların bir arada dayanışma içinde yaşam ortaklığını ifade eder" (Öcalan, 2011, p. 10).

[39]Devlet ulusunda ortak zihniyete damgasını vuran milliyetçilik iken, demokratik ulusta özgürlük ve dayanışma bilincidir…. Devlet ulusu homojen toplum peşinde olduğu halde demokratik ulus ağırlıklı olarak farklı kollektivitelerden oluşur. Farklılıkları zenginlik olarak görür. (Öcalan, 2011, pp. 10-1)

The key difference can be gathered under two conceptualizations: homogeneity and centralization. Against the homogenization, the new definition of the nation celebrates difference and plurality. It points to the multi cultural, multi ethnic, multi lingual fabric of diverse communities. Rather than forcing communities to live under "one language, one flag", democratic nation targets to deconstruct the nationalist hegemonic discourse.

Another area of criticism is the centralization. The critique of centralized organization of the existing state formation will take us to another novel conceptualization, democratic autonomy. Rather than a vertically organized and one centered organization of the nation state, the democratic nation will propose to organize a new decentralized and much more horizontal form of governance. The project is taken as the unique alternative for the communities due to its focus on the alternative institutional framing which concentrates on gender equality, environmentalism, and decentralized organization.[40]

The proposed self-governance project is tied with the redefinition of the nation. As it is argued,

> *Democratic nation* brings all of its members together under the autonomous establishments. It does not content itself with the mentality and cultural association among its members. This is the definitive feature of the democratic nation. Democratic and autonomous governance style defines the democratic nation. This style makes democratic nation alternative of the nation state. (Öcalan, 2011, p. 11)[41]

[40] It is important to state that this project of democratic autonomy is not proposed by Öcalan only for the Northern Kurdistan communities. It is designed as a project uniting 4 parts of Kurdistan under a form of confederation. However, since the explanation of three other countries and their peculiar context exceeds the scope of my discussion (due to the lack of knowledge and research), I only take into account the discussions of Kurdistan of Turkey. Yet, it is important to see the interconnections between the four parts of Kurdistan and the validity of the project for the other parts. Rojava, Western Kurdistan can be taken as an example where the democratic autonomy project is being organized and realized.

[41] Demokratik ulus, sadece zihniyet, kültür ortaklığıyla yetinmeyen tüm üyelerini demokratik özerk kurumlarda birleştiren ve yöneten ulustur. Belirleyici olan bu yönüdür.Demokratik, özerk yönetim tarzı demokratik ulus olmanın başta gelen koşuludur. Bu yönüyle de ulus devletin alternatifidir. (Öcalan, 2011, p.11)

As we see in his defense texts, Abdullah Öcalan (2011) takes the state as the "original sin" of humanity. For him, "liberation cannot be achieved by means of state building but rather by the deepening of democracy" (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2011, p. 152). Contrary to the formation of a Kurdish state, such as Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq, what Öcalan proposes was related with the organization of "peoples' congress" which would include all parts of Kurdistan.[42] In other words, what is proposed by Öcalan in his defense submitted to the court in Greece and by the party complex in their congresses, is a structure which defines itself not on the basis of state building project but on the basis of a new spatial utopia, as I would like to call it, that decomposes and recomposes the boundaries of a possible governance mechanism.

Democratic autonomy project is developed on the basis of decentralizing the present nation state formation. Rather than a one centered organizational structure, dispersion of the centre of power is proposed. According to this picture, Turkey is proposed to be divided in 26 or 27 districts in line with the cultural and economic fabric of the communities. The division of districts will not be based on any ethnic identity. In contrast to the nation state formation and boundaries forced by it, the new decentralized formation suggests the formation of new zones (bölge) which will link to each other (DTK, 2012, p. 83).

Democratic Autonomy is the project which is proposed as the one and only recipe and the possibility of "resolution" for the continuing turmoil in Turkey and Middle East.[43] "The way of resolution" is to reinforce the operation of direct democracy via organizing different scales of assemblies. The smallest, but the core,

[42] This congress is named as DTK- Demokratik Toplum Kongresi.

[43]In the documents of the party, the notion of "democratic resolution" (demokratik çözüm) is used.

assembly in urban areas is taken as the neighborhood assemblies.[44] In this autonomy project, neighborhoods are represented as one of the most significant units from which direct democracy and participation are to be experimented. The consolidation of the idea of participation in social affairs in smaller units is argued to strengthen the connections between neighborhood – district – country-region. The project consolidates itself around the organization of assemblies from neighborhood to district, from district to country and lastly the region.

The emphasis on the connection between these variously scaled assemblies are important since the direct democracy practice which aim to open up a space for the rethinking locality and space will be organized through the links between these councils. How these links are defined and realized is quite an important and hard question to answer due to the novelty of the project. What is proposed in the texts is that these links are constructed and maintained with the coordination among the representatives of the different scales of assemblies. Neighborhood assemblies are seen as the main mechanisms through which policy making process will be shaped according to the needs of localities. As it is said, in democratic autonomy, the decision making authority belongs to the assemblies and deputies of village, neighborhood and district. In these assemblies, participation, pluralism, and direct democracy are the fundamental principles. These local assemblies are both accountable to the dwellers of particular space, and to the administrative Democratic People's Congress (DTK, 2012, p. 131).

[44] In rural areas, we see the expansion of the assembly formation and addition of one smaller assembly, namely village communes or assemblies, (köy komünleri).

2.6 Conclusion

In this part, I claim that the shifts in the Kurdish liberation movements can gain meanings only if we discuss it in relation to the worldwide changes underwent by other national liberation movements. While the worldwide experiences have shaped each other, it also resulted in a new theoretical debate, a debate on radical democratic discourse. I think there is a dialectical relationship between theoretical shifts and practical shifts experienced; both affected and changed each other via creating a new trend of "democratization" rather than armed struggle. What I propose is to read the two main changes in the Kurdish movement toward de-centralization in the light of this framework. These are the shifts in the reorganization of the party form and in the redefinition of the strategy for social transformation.

Firstly, existing party formation is transformed, de-centralized, in such a manner that new localities and centers (such as Syria, Iraq and Iran) are rendered visible. The one centered structure of the party is tried to be transformed to a party complex which is accompanied by the appropriate name changes.

The second one is related with the transformation of party politics. Looking at the defense texts of Abdullah Öcalan and party congress reports, I claim that there is a change in the party politics from a state centric perspective towards a confederation of democratic autonomous assemblies. In other words, the boundaries and relationalities forced by the nation state are criticized and aimed to be replaced via deconstructing the vertical and centered organization of the bureaucratic nation state.

The struggle over the state formation is followed by the proposal of novel conceptualizations. This new discursive space is positioned against the hegemonic capitalist discourse and its constructed spatial imaginary. I think, a new form of

politics is introduced that centers itself on the organization of different scales of assemblies.

The organization of various scales of assemblies in different parts of Turkey and Northern Kurdistan is the main pillar through which a regional decentralized organizational structure is to be developed (DTK, 2012; Zirig, 2014). The "social reconstruction" discussed by the party complex is declared to be materialized with the organization of assemblies by deconstructing the meaning attributed to present local governance practices. However, to what extend it is discussed and realized is open to question as the stories collected from a particular neighborhood assembly in Istanbul will be depicted. At that point, it is important to note that I try to make an analysis of an organizational project, neighborhood assembly, mainly referring to the principles defined in some texts. Although these texts (defenses and congress reports) are significant in the formation of the party line, it is important to remember that they are texts written by someone or a group of people with a certain framework and with a certain audience in mind. The texts I have analyzed have a certain genre that force, in a way, a particular relationship among certain groups, the party and Kurdish community in our case.[45] Thus, the framework of the texts, certain word uses and historical narratives have pointed to those who have some ties and relations with the movement. What is proposed and expected by the movement is to find ways to put into practices the discussions in the texts. It is a hard mission to fulfill because what is expected is to concretize the debates that are present on paper. This concretization process necessitates interpretation processes that aim at creating a bridge between the texts and real life. As I will show, this necessitates "mediators" within the movement who interpret the texts, in their own ways, to the communities

[45] For more discussion on texts, see Bazerman, 2004.

which they aim to organize. Therefore, what we encounter is mediators (cadres within the movement in our case) using texts to create new meanings and relations. These are the relations developed within a conjuncture that goes beyond the texts at hand and opens a new space up for new discussions not envisioned a priori.

CHAPTER 3

TWO DIFFERENT IMAGINARIES ON SPACE AND RELATIONALITY: DECENTRALIZATION EXPERIENT WITH A NEIGHBORHOOD ASSEMBLY AND MUNICIPALITY

State imposed normality makes permanent transgression inevitable (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 23).

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will elaborate on how the Democratic Autonomy project, as it is discussed in texts by various actors (such as people from different positions within the party, "leader" of the party, military branch, and so on), is being put into realization. For that purpose, I look at the neighborhood assembly that the activists have organized in Beyoğlu, Istanbul. The analysis on the assembly of Hacıahmet neighborhood is quintessential due to two reasons. First, the Democratic Autonomy is a *spatial* project with its proposal of the organization of different scales of assemblies such as village communes, neighborhood assemblies, district assemblies, region assemblies, and so on. It is a *spatial* project since it challenges the existing socio spatial imaginary of the nation state via proposing a new decentralized form of governance within which the neighborhoods are the smallest and the most significant units. Therefore, the scrutiny of a neighborhood enables me to interrogate the way in which the basic premises of the Democratic Autonomy project is carried out in action. The second reason is the location of the assembly. Rather than selecting a

neighborhood in Kurdistan, I have found looking at a neighborhood assembly in Istanbul more challenging for various reasons. One of the most important reasons is the hardships and daily borders faced by the inhabitants in terms of local politics. The border between the inhabitants and the present local governance structure can be elaborated via looking at the daily discrepancies and conflicts encountered due to the existence of two different imaginaries regarding the local politics: the local governance mechanism of the nation state and the decentralized model of the Kurdish Movement. Since I claim that these two different imaginaries regarding the local politics are shaping each other rather than excluding one another, I find it important to elaborate on how the everyday conflicts are dealt differently by these two groups. In order to clarify my point, I prefer to focus on the conceptualization of space both by the nation state (by looking at the example of municipality) and Kurdish Liberation movement (by looking at the neighborhood assembly).

In my discussion, I will mainly deal with the concept of space because the project proposed by the Democratic Autonomy is firstly about a re-definition of the concept of space. In this redefinition, I especially focus on the four characteristics of the notion of space.

First is the conception of space as a social product. Rather than thinking space as a taken for granted entity, I will try to read space as a social product referring to the discussions developed by the critical geography literature and mainly by Henri Lefebvre. Second characteristic is space being a political construction. Space which seems homogeneous is produced in a political way on the grounds of power relations. As Lefebvre (2009) states, there is a politics of space because space is "political and ideological" (p. 170). Third one is space as a conflictual construction. Since I will be emphasizing the antagonistic characteristic of the "politics" or

"political", spaces are also taken as areas of various forms of confrontations. In other words, spaces are political therefore they are considerably conflictual. The forth and the last one is space's being a relational phenomena. While the "territorial state", as it is called by the geographers, conceptualized topographies as merely geographical areas or "things" which can be controlled and dominated, Democratic Autonomy claims to take spaces and localities on the basis of relations between them and inhabitants. With the help of reading the notion of space as a relational construct, it will be possible to imagine various links and relations between different geographies.

Informed by this theoretical discussion on space, I would like to work on the discussion of decentralization not with the notions of inclusion, exclusion, or integration of inhabitants into various locality organizations. Rather, I try to take proposed decentralization project as a form of being "alongside" the state.[46] The separation of the democratic autonomy project from the discourse of "integration" is necessary because in the new spatial imaginary concretized under the assembly formation, Kurdish movement does not propose any form of inclusion to the existing form of governance. However, that does not mean they position themselves outside of it. Rather, it comes up with a new form of existing nearby the state which challenges the local politics discourse that centers on integration. The novelty of the project in this respect may be read as a contribution to the critical geography literature where the autonomy or locality discussions are mostly made on the basis of inclusion – exclusion paradigm.

[46] I inspired from the talk of Nükhet Sirman, thus all of the misrepresentations belong to me (Sirman, 2015).

3.2 A step towards critical spatial thinking

Hacıahmet is a neighborhood which is located between Tarlabaşı and Dolapdere. It has approximately 17.000 inhabitants excluding the non-official Syrian residents as the old muhtar emphasized.[47] It is called one of the four "Kurdish neighborhoods" in Beyoğlu (three other neighborhoods in addition to Hacıahmet are Çukur, Bülbül and Yenişehir) due to the ethnicity of inhabitants and the dominance of the pro-Kurdish parties which have taken the highest votes from the neighborhoods (especially from Hacıahmet and Çukur neighborhoods).[48] Besides many other characteristics of the neighborhood which will be elaborated, what strikes my attention is a section of inhabitants' constant attempts of organizing a neighborhood assembly. The recent initiative, the activists started to discuss in 2014 and organize in the beginnings of 2015, is different from the past practices of establishing assemblies as the co-chair of People's Democratic Party (HDP) of Beyoğlu claims. As the newly elected co-chair of HDP says

> Assemblies have been tried before in İstanbul, Haciahmet between the years 2007-2013.The last one tried in the districts in 2013 but we fell short. While one of the reasons of that is the fact that cadres fell short, the other one is related to the KCK operations. Though, there is a relief because of the solution process. We have a better environment for our works. (personal communication, September 26, 2014)[49]

[47] For a long time, almost 35 years as he says, neighborhood had a muhtar who was from Erzurum. In the last local governance election in 2014, a muhtar from Mardin was elected. This change is required to be emphasized because it shows the increased authority gained by the Kurdish community in the neighborhood in the local governance level. If we think the muhtar as the mediator between the municipality and the neighborhood, now, the connection between them is claimed to be strengthened.

[48] For instance, HDP (People's Democratic Party) was the first party in the last local elections. The results of local governance elections can be checked from: https://sonuc.ysk.gov.tr/module/sspsYerel.jsf

[49] Daha önce de meclisler denendi İstanbul'da; Hacıahmet'te.2007'de ve 2011'de. En sonuncusu da 2013'te ilçelerde denendi fakat çok yetersiz kaldık. Bunun nedenlerinden biri kadroların yetersiz kalması, ikincisi KCK operasyonlarıdır…. Şimdi yine çözüm süreci falan bir rehavet durumu olsa da, daha rahat bir çalışma ortamı var. (personal communication, September 26, 2014)

It is different now, for him, because they can "openly" work for the organization of assembly related with the peace process in Turkey. It is different because what he implies and elaborates during the interview was the KCK trials which put almost all of the members of the party including himself and activists into prison due to their "affiliation with KCK". And this imprisonment in mass scale hindered the organization of assemblies. There was left no cadre to organize meetings and continue the discussions of decentralization (Amed, 2014).[50] These were the cadres who interpret the texts to those working for the assembly organizations.

What is this "affiliation" which is taken as a reason for the imprisonment? Activists of Istanbul, in my case people who tried to organize a neighborhood assembly in Hacıahmet, were arrested because they are accused of being a part of the bigger picture, "civil structure of KCK".[51] Then, the question emerges: why are these assemblies taken as "dangerous" and "suspicious" by the state? I think, the theoretical framework that I will try to develop provides one of the crucial answers for these questions: the framework which bases itself on the "critical spatial thinking" (Soja, 1999, p. 263) that posits the fact that space is strikingly political.

Why do we need to look at the concept of space/place in order to grasp the political project of Kurdish Liberation Movement, the project of decentralization? At that point, we can start with the highly quoted part from Edward Said's (1993) discussion of geography in *Culture and Imperialism* and try to provide an answer to our questions.

[50] In the period of 30 months, 7748 people were put under custody and 3895 were detained in KCK case. See http://www.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/133216-30-ayda-kckden-7748-gozalti-3895-tutuklama

[51]You can reach KCK indictment from this website: http://www.ankarastrateji.org/haber/kck-iddianamesi-tam-metni-144/

As Said (1993) says,

> Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings....what I find myself doing is rethinking geography....charting changing constellations of power, knowledge, and geography. (p. 274)

As Said puts, the main terrain of struggle is related with geography and space. What we have encountered with is not a one way narrative of space, the narrative basing itself only on borders and territorities, or "soldiers and cannons". Rather, as Lefebvre also claims the science of space or conceptualization of space by the nation states may enable a different kind of struggle on space to appear (Lefebvre, 2009). I am proposing to think together what Said and Lefebvre put and claim that the rethinking of geography and spatiality, then, will enable us to give meaning to the "resistance" as Lefebvre would call, or counter hegemonic conceptualization of spatiality.

Geography itself comes along with particular imaginings and socio-spatial imaginations as Said claims. Thus, following the path opened up by Said, I take neighborhood assemblies as organizational structures which require and pave the way for the rethinking of spatiality and politics of place. And this attempt of re-thinking will be elaborative in terms of understanding the spatial imaginary of the nation state that regards the direct democracy practice as a threat to its territorial structure. To put it simply, the organizations of neighborhood assemblies are dangerous because they have the potential of criticizing the existing socio-political imagination of nation state. For a state which gives importance to the boundaries and territories on the basis of homogenization and centralism, an organizational practice with different spatial imaginary on the basis of plurality is "dangerous". And besides the space that's opened up for raising a critique, material changes alongside the state mechanism are proposed with the organization of various scales of assemblies.

Broadly, I think, the assembly organization and attempt of fostering decentralization redefines what is taken for granted, that is, space.

3.3 Two definitions of space

There are mainly two lines of enquiry regarding the definition of space. In the first one, space is conceptualized merely as a given, as a thing over which state control is maintained through various mechanisms. The second one proposes to look at the ambivalence, contradiction and paradoxes inherent to place via emphasizing the importance of relationality (Rajaran & Soguk, 2006, p. 369).

From "the state centered view of power", as Agnew (1999) claims, "space occupied by states is seen fixed"(p.174). Since the nation state organization differs itself from all other types of organizations "by its claim to total sovereignty over its territory", it pretends as if it has all rights to define the spatial configuration. It tends to conceptualize the territory as a "thing" which can be molded according to the agendas of the power holders (p. 175). And, the formulation of the spaces turns into a terrain upon which the sovereign power manifests its will and power.

As opposed to the conceptualization of space as a "thing" or space as a "container" by state centered perspective, Doreen Massey (2005) claims that space should be redefined in the sociological studies in such a way that it emphasizes the relationality. For her, space can be discussed mainly as a product of interrelations, the sphere of possibility of existence of multiplicity, and a processing system, never a closed system (pp. 10-11)."Relations" as Massey claims "are understood as embedded practices" (p. 10). Space does not exist prior to the existing identities, but rather space and identities coexist and mold each other. As she says, "(s)pace … is a

product of interrelations. Identities/entities, the relations "between" them, and the spatiality which is part of them, are all co-constitutive"(p. 11).

As opposed to the state centered perspective, spaces cannot be taken as fixed "things" which are molded irrespective of the relations between them and the people living on it. As Massey continues, "the spatial is social relations 'stretched out'"(Massey, 1994, p. 2). However, from a statist perspective, spaces are regarded as "things", a territory in "stasis" (Massey, 1994, p. 4), which ever-existed irrespective of historical, political or social changes (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005).

Besides the analysis of Massey, Lefebvre (1991) also proposes a reading of space which can be taken as one of the founding pillars of critical geography literature. As it is explained by Lefebvre, spaces are taken as "commodified things" that can be bought and sold. However, this perspective disregards the "social relationships embedded" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 27). Rather than this reductionist reading of space, Lefebvre (1991) underlines the interaction between relations and spatial configurations. He claims that each society "produces its own space" (p. 32). Thus, it is not a one way production configured by the state centered view. Rather, it is a complex production process shaped by the relations existing between state and society; a space and its inhabitants. As Schmid (2008) explains in his reading of Lefebvre, space is not taken as "an independent material reality existing 'in itself'". In contrast to that, Lefebvre uses "the production of space" in order to say that "space is fundamentally bound up with social relations" (p. 28).

According to the critical geographer I referred, from the angle of "space existing in itself", spaces are always present; only the power holders have been changing via altering the political agenda applied on them. Space is considered in

isolation, as an "empty abstraction" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 12). Space, in the hands of nation states, turns into a political instrument that can be directed with the use of various organs according to the needs of the political power. And, this imaginary of space of the nation state comes with a particular ideology that defines itself around the notions of centralism and homogeneity. The state applies the notion "relationality" in accordance with its ideology and uses it in such a way that "it ensures its control of places, its strict hierarchy, the homogeneity of the whole, and the segregation of the parts. It is thus an administratively controlled and even a "*policed space"*(Lefebvre, 2009, p. 187).

What a nation state claims is the total control over territories via disregarding the living and political character of the space (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1989; Massey, 2005). One of the main mechanisms, for me, which can be taken as a good indicator of the state's conceptualization of space is the understanding and practice of local governance.

3.4 A comparative reading of local governance and decentralization

Related to my field research and the data I collected from the interviews in the neighborhoods, I focus on and compare two practices in order to elaborate Democratic Autonomy project. One of them is the concept of local governance (yerel yönetim), the other one is decentralization (yerinden yönetim). Since in Turkish these two concepts are quite similar phonetically, it appeared in my interviews that these are sometimes used interchangeably. However, even if they have been used interchangeably by some activists, I take them as the explicitly different forms of organizational practices with completely different mechanisms and socio-spatial

imaginaries. It is this point that I needed to raise as a question, due to the fact that interviewees pointed to the everyday practiced differences between these two phenomena even if they use the terms interchangeably. Thus, as a way of delving into these differences, I prefer to look at the everyday conflicts and borders, and how the two separate imaginaries (of the nation state and the Kurdish movement) dealt with these conflicts differently. Rather than grouping the two perspectives as one that commodifies the space (imaginary of the nation state) and one that centers on relationality (imaginary of the Kurdish movement), or state space that "reifies" the space versus communalistic space as we see in the critical geography literature, I prefer to elaborate how two different forms of relationalities are developed and maintained within a particular spatiality, a neighborhood, by different bodies. Thus, I will take the neighborhood as the site through which two separate spatial configurations are materialized. Since the concepts of local governance and decentralization are different from each other in many ways, looking at the everyday encounters can be a way of elaborating these differences.

Another reason for selecting and comparing these two notions is tied to the ambivalent position attributed to the state by those who organize the neighborhood assembly. As I discussed in the introduction chapter, organizing through a neighborhood assembly in Istanbul is different from that of Kurdistan because there is a lack of support from the local authorities. Thus, how to relate with the existing local authority, the Beyoğlu Municipality run by AKP, emerges as a significant issue to focus on. However, since it is hard, according to my interviews, to define a unique line to explain the relationship between the assembly and municipality, or decentralization and local governance, I will depict the complexity of relationships among these two groups that have different spatial imaginaries. For that purpose, I

give examples from the everyday encounters (among the "state" and the inhabitants) that aim to show how the different relationalities take place among these two groups and how these relations are configured through the political agendas and conjuncture.

3.4.1 Hegemonic definition of space: Example of local governance

I start with a brief chronology which signifies the important reorganizational changes effecting the local governance and municipalities. As Danielson and Keleş (1985) claim, with rapid urbanization in Turkey starting from 1960s, municipalities turned into important mechanism for local service delivery (pp. 219-220). With the importance started to be given to the local governance institutions in 1960s, there have been continual changes regarding the mechanisms and organs of municipalities.

In 1961, people started to elect the mayors. This presented a change in the electoral system because prior to that date, mayors had been elected by the council members who were the members of the municipality council.[52] This change is read as a kind of increasing the voice of local governance via changing the ties between the centre and the local (Toksöz et al, 2009, p. 38). It is also claimed that elected mayors began raising their voices for more autonomous municipalities with the demand of a certain authority regarding the issues of the local (Sümer, 2012, p. 25).

The demand for "autonomous" municipalities is claimed to be strengthened in the year of 1973, with the winning of quite a large amount of municipalities by the opponent party.[53] It is taken as an important turning point in the local governance

[52]Prior to that date, the mayor was elected within the members of the city council by the members of the city council. Thus, the city inhabitants did not have a right to vote in these elections.

[53] While CHP won the general elections, Adalet Partisi was the main opposition party. The local governance elections didn't change the picture. Thus, we saw the two main parties which won various

history because it points to the rising demand of autonomy of the municipalities. However, this demand lacks the "democracy" emphasis as opposed to the Kurdish movement's proposal of autonomy.

In the year of 1984, we see the foundation of Büyükşehir Municipalities which broadens the authority of local governances. As Görmez (1997) claims the demand for continual increase in financial resources continued through 1990s.[54] However, the demand for autonomous municipalities disappeared (Görmez, 1997). This can be explained in two ways according to Sümer (2012), "firstly, central governments increased state investment to industrialized urban localities and began solving ingrained urban problems. Secondly, local autonomy has become a "political red line with the rise of Kurdish conflict"(p. 25).

As the central government attempts to hold power via increasing its investments (in construction for example) rather than sharing the authority with local governances, the idea of local autonomy was rejected by all parties on the basis that it may disrupt the "national unity". Therefore, in the 1990s, we have witnessed the consolidation of the power of the government for the sake of national unity and centralized government. This is the period when two different imaginations regarding space began to appear with the increase of the power held by the pro-Kurdish parties founded, closed and re-established in 1990s.[55] The first advocates the consolidation

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municipalities in Turkey. CHP won the mayorship in 33 cities which was followed by AP with 22 mayorships.

[54] Although there was a certain expansion of authority in the local governance structure such as authority on town planning (imar yetkisi), there was no control mechanism to check the authority's acts. The impacts of this "uncontrolled" authority can be seen via looking at the results of unplanned urbanization approved by the municipalities. The municipalities licensed anyone who wanted to raise buildings. This unplanned urbanization and defective constructions resulted in the high number of the loss of lives in the earthquake of 1999. See: Toksöz et al. 2009, p. 39.

[55] In the 90s, several pro-Kurdish parties were founded but they were mostly closed down due the claims of separatism. HEP (Halkın Emek Partisi) was founded in 1990. It was outlawed by Turkey's

of the centralist government via empowering the position of the centre; the second, the imaginary of the Kurdish movement, proposes to transgress the boundaries imposed by the nation state's conceptualization of the local.

The latest legal amendments on the local governance and municipalities have been ratified in 2005. AKP government passed a law which redefined the responsibilities of municipalities and broadened the scope of the authority of municipalities.[56] These changes are evaluated as a *reform* about local governance and municipalities (Toksöz, 2009; Özgür & Kösecik, 2007). With the change of the laws, authorities of municipalities commenced to include: restoration of school buildings, authority of urban renewal of *gecekondu* areas and other spaces in bad conditions, enhancement of economy and trade, encouragement of investments on areas of health, tourism, trade, education, etc. In short, central government gave mandate to local governance in multiple areas (Toksöz, 2009, pp. 44-45). How these authorities are realized can be grasped via looking at our interviews.

Since the year of 1984, with the foundation of Büyükşehir (Toksöz, 2009, p. 39), Beyoğlu Municipality has consisted of 45 neighborhoods. While I conducted interviews in the four neighborhoods of Beyoğlu (Haciahmet, Yenişehir, Çukur and Bülbül) which are highly populated by Kurds, I particularly focus on the neighborhood of Hacıahmet. By looking at the practices of the Beyoğlu Municipality that I observed and the inhabitants explained to me in Hacıahmet neighborhood, I try

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Constitutional Court in August 1993. The ex-HEP MPs quickly formed an interim replacement organization, the Özgür Demokrasi Partisi (ÖZDEP) that was renamed the DEP. At the end of 1993, DEP was also found "separatist" and closed down. HEP was followed by Halkın Demokrasi Partisi (HADEP) in 1994. The DEP trial concluded in 1994. In this trial, eight MPs received sentences ranged from three years to fifteen years. In 1997, 31 HADEP members were imprisoned. And, the trials, closures, and arrestments continued in 1998 (White, 2000, p. 170; Güneş, 2013).

[56]However that doesn't mean that they change the local - centre relationship. Centrality was kept but localities gained a certain authority over some of the issues regarding the locals.

to indicate the "local governance" understanding of the state that is shaped by the abovementioned reformations and its conceptualization by the inhabitants.

Hacıahmet neighborhood is located in Tarlabaşı. We can walk down from Ömer Hayyam by passing all Tarlabaşı, then crossing the main street of İplikçi Fırını. When we cross the street, in the entrance of the neighborhood on the left, there is a preliminary school. This is the only school in the neighborhood with approximately 17.000 people inhabiting. There is only one school where each classroom has approximately 70 students as the teacher I spoke with says. There is also another school which is tried to be built. However, inhabitants of the neighborhood are quite suspicious about the never-finishing school construction. They evaluate this half-built structure as a "political instrument" which is used by the central government for demanding votes in the local elections of 2014.

Walking in the neighborhood, we see a new building named *Semt Konağı*,[57] nearly in the middle of the neighborhood which is accompanied by the Health Care Centre, a small park, and the office of the Muhtar. In the Semt Konagi, there are various classes opened especially for women and children such as math, English, literacy, Koran, etc. However, most of the women who tried to attend some of the courses quitted quickly. As the women I talked with claim, this place is "an instrument of the government" which does not take the characteristics of the inhabitants into consideration. As an example, we can look at the hardships experienced due to the language. The municipality opened up a health care centre but there is a big problem of language. The health care centre is used mostly by women and children. And significant number of women does not know any other language

[57] It is a multi functional centre which opened in 2012 by Beyoğlu Belediyesi. AKP government has opened 11 Semt Konağı in İstanbul.

than Kurdish. Since there is no personnel knowing Kurdish, going to see the doctor "turns into a nightmare" as one of the women says. She continues,

> Sometimes, we have fights even in a receipt queue in a hospital just because of speaking in Kurdish. Even I involved few times. I said:" Should not she speak, if she cannot speak Turkish?" It is no harm to staff a Kurdish employee. It is good for both sides. But they always say that there is no employee who can speak Kurdish. They do not even ask us. (personal communication, February 26,2015)[58]

It is a quite crowded neighborhood with a constant increase in population due to the renewal project in Tarlabaşı and war in Syria, as the inhabitants and real estate agents claimed. While rents ascended due to the increase in the demand for housing, the constant rumor about the scope of the urban renewal project creates uneasiness among the inhabitants. Inhabitants of Hacıahmet talked about the scope of the renewal because they feared that it may include their neighborhood.[59] The change in the act of title deed was read as a sign for that coming renewal project by the inhabitants. As one of them claimed,

> Most of the houses (houses not the lands) here have title deeds. However, a year ago, municipality replaced joint owned property by something called parceling deed. I think, the reason for this replacement is the fact that there will be an urban renewal in the neighborhood (personal communication, January 12, 2014).[60]

Actually, there was no project designed for the neighborhoods of Hacıahmet or Yenişehir. However, the threat felt by the members claimed to be caused by the lack of information. Since the municipality didn't try to give information to the

[58]Bir fiş kuyruğunda bile kavga çıkıyor sağlık ocağında.Niye Kürtçe konuşuyorsun, sesini neden yükseltiyorsun diye.Ben bile dahil oldum. Niye bu kadın Türkce bilmiyorsa konuşmasın mı diye.....Siz birini buraya koysanız Kürt, hem size iyi gelir hem gelen millet ezilmez falan dedik.Ama elimizde yok diyolar.Bize hiç sormuyolar. (personal communication, February 26, 2015)

[59]It is a valid concern due to the starting project in Hacı hüsrev neighborhood which is adjacent to Hacıahmet.

[60] Buradaki evlerin çoğu tapulu (ev değil de arsa tapulu) ancak bir yıl once belediye tarafından hisseli tapudan joint owned property ifraz tapulu parceling deed diye bir sisteme geçildi. İfraz tapulu sisteme geçilmesinin nedenin de mahallenin yakın bir zamanda kentsel dönüşüme uğrayacak olması diye düşünüyorum. (personal communication, January 12, 2014)

inhabitants about any projects concerning the neighborhood, inhabitants were afraid of finding themselves homeless suddenly. The politics regarding the neighborhood was decided in the meetings of the party organs of central government and tried to be applied to a particular locality without regarding the relationships, needs and requests of inhabitants. As it was emphasized mostly, while there were urgent needs concerning the neighborhood such as provision of water or opening of place that provides cheaper bread (halk ekmeği), the local governance only related itself to the neighborhood during the election times via reconstructing the roads and pavements. As one of the interviewees said,

> We see in the times of elections. Everywhere is excavated. In each election period, somewhere is excavated. They either make asphalt or roads. However, there is no infrastructure. It is always patched. These are done in the times of elections in order to delude people. Otherwise, you cannot say municipalities do anything in the places where Kurds and Romans live. (personal communication, February 8,2015)[61]

What are the mechanisms through which the local governance structure counsels the inhabitants? Or are there any mechanisms to do so? Municipalities have three main organs, namely mayor (belediye başkanı), city council (belediye meclisi), and municipal board (belediye encümeni) (Toksöz, 1999, p. 51). The members of these mechanisms are elected in every 5 years. What is interesting, I think, is the emphasis of the inhabitants on the lack of accountability of the municipality and the members of local governance. It appears that people have no contact with the municipality other than times of trouble. There is no other relation, according to my interviews, which connects the space, the neighborhood, people on it and the local governance to each other, other than the faults of the local governance. Thus, we do not observe a

[61]Seçim dönemlerinde görüyoruz.Her yer kazılıdır. Her seçim döneminde biryerler kazılır.Ya asfaltlar yamalanır, ya yol yapılır. Altta yapılan hiçbir şey yok; yama üzerine yama yapılıyor.Seçimden seçime göz boyamak için yapılan şeyler.Yoksa belediyelerin Kürtlerin yaşadığı yerde ve Romanların da yaşadığı yerde çok da bişey yaptığı söylenemez. (personal communication, February 8, 2015)

kind of participative process in the decision making of issues related to the neighborhood. The local governance is only mentioned as a mechanism which fails in certain topics regarding to the neighborhood such as construction of roads, lack of schools, problems about infrastructure which ends up with constant water cuts, etc. Not far from the relationship with municipality described by the inhabitants, the story told by the cadres (of the AKP) delegated to the neighborhood can be taken as a representation of the local governance's understanding of neighborhood. One of the workers in Semt Konagi claims that in this "dangerous neighborhood" (*tekinsiz*), there is an "invisible line" which separates the *chaotic* (*olaylı*) part from the *tranquil* (*olaysız*) part. Where she means by chaotic is the area covering the park of Hacıahmet and the entrance of the neighborhood that are used as a centre for demonstrations of the party. For her, and others that I have spoken with, there is a clear division within the neighborhood. Although the Kurdish inhabitants do not accept this separation due to their relationship not only with Hacıahmet but also with other 3 neighborhoods, the woman in Semt Konagi proposes an "invisible boundary" within the neighborhood.

What is this "line" that the AKP cadres speak about? It is the superficial line which aims to segregate the neighborhood inhabitants from each other. In other words, it is a "segregation line."Parallel to the discussion of "state space" that gives importance to the homogenization both of the spaces and people living on it, there is a certain attempt of homogenization of space and inhabitants with this division of the neighborhood. There is a certain attempt to homogenize territories in order to define them and develop political strategies on them. Since Hacıahmet neighborhood is composed of multi ethnic and multi lingual components, it is regarded as a kind of a "threat" for unity. While these multi ethnic and multi lingual characteristics of the

neighborhood are evaluated as a kind of "richness" by the Kurdish movement (as I will be discussing), the nation state, represented in our case by the local governance mechanism, takes this feature as a conflict that should be dealt with. It is formulated as a kind of "problem" that needed to be taken under control because of the fact that it challenges the nation state imaginary of "national unity" (Gellner, 1983). Thus, it is important to point that nation state is not devoid of any imaginary regarding the space apart from simply *commodifying* it. Rather, it should be noted that the *commodifying* and *thingfying* attitude of the nation state implies a particular imaginary of space that brings about a particular relationality between space and people. And, the particular configuration of the spatiality by the nation state creates a particular form of relationality that positions the inhabitants in Hacıahmet as "usual suspects", rather than people who have the potential and capacity of self-determination as conceived by the Democratic Autonomy project.

Segregation and homogenization are the different sides of the same coin. As Lefebvre (2009) discusses, the aim is to manage the "segregation of the parts and homogenization of the whole" (pp. 187-188). Thus, the *chaotic* part is called dangerous in order to show that the *tranquil* part is more livable. Since the creation of a harmonious or non-conflictual territory is impossible, what is done is to create a conflictual territory. And, the control of this conflict would be managed or, as Lefebvre calls, "policed" by the state with the help of its mechanisms. The "state space" called by Lefebvre is the definition of space on the basis of chaos. And, it is one of the definitive features of the "capitalistic space". The constructed and created catastrophe and the control of this created chaos is the main feature of state space that differentiates itself from the spaces of difference. As Lefebvre (2009) explains succinctly,

> State space subordinates both chaos and difference to its implacable logistics. It does not eliminate the chaos, but manages it. On the other hand, it does capture differences at the moment of their emergence and abolishes them. (p. 250)

In a nutshell, as Massey claims there is a multiplicity of narratives in the definition of space (Massey, 1999, p. 281) and various ways of imagining space and its boundaries (Valentine, 1999; Massey, 2005). One of the narratives is provided by the state with the deployment of one of its mechanisms, municipalities. In Lefebvrian terms, while we have the "state space" which can be exemplified by the existing local governance practices on the one hand, we have another form called "spaces of difference", space as a terrain of possibilities, which can be read with the help of democratic autonomy project's decentralization discussion (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 192).

3.4.2 The alternative redefinition of space: Example of decentralization

The answers given to the question of "what is a neighborhood?" is the path that I tried to follow in order to come up with an analysis of neighborhood assembly in Beyoğlu. I prefer to ask this question since how the neighborhood is defined or understood can be taken as a base for the assembly organization. I will look at the various definitions of neighborhood provided by the inhabitants via pursuing the theoretical line that underscores the definitive role of "relationality". According to my reading, relationality can be taken as a form of openness to any interaction. Different forms of relations define the way of doing politics, local politics in our case, in the neighborhood. In this chapter, I refer to the "relationality" discussion of Doreen Massey (2005) but try to localize it through paying attention to the specificities of the Hacıahmet neighborhood. I basically refer to three forms of relations that shape the organization of the neighborhood assembly. The first one is the relations between the Kurdish movement and the state (epitomized in the

practices of municipality). As the interviews explained, there is no clear cut relation between the assembly organizers, or members and the municipality. While the inhabitants position themselves mainly against the existing local governance system, they don't give up the demanding of needs at the local level. The second one is the relations among different geographies of Kurdish region on the grounds of ethnicity. And, the last one is the relations between the assembly organizers, Kurds, in the neighborhood and the "other" peoples in Hacıahmet. Thus, it is appropriate to claim that there is multiplicity of relations. What the neighborhood assembly tries to achieve can be taken as a way of dealing with these relations and opening up a space for the negotiations of these different forms of relationalities.

In the framework of critical geography that underlines the definitive role of the relationality, space and social relations are taken as co-constitutive (Gregory & Urry, 1985; Lefebvre, 2009; Soja, 1989). It is an approach which accentuates relationality factor in the construction of spatiality. I am required to follow this theoretical framework due to two reasons (Zirig, 2014, p. 82).[62]

The first one is related with the Kurdish Liberation Movement's definitions of spatiality. In the discussed decentralization model, the neighborhood assemblies are taken as microcosms of the broader ecological, democratic, gender equality based society paradigm and the main representation of the direct democracy experience (Zirig, 2014, p. 82). The democratic autonomy project is evaluated as a "*territorial experiment* for a free and directly democratic society" (Taylor, 2014). This experiment bases itself on different scales of assemblies where neighborhoods occupy an important place via ascribing new meanings to existing spaces and

[62]There might be more than two reasons. However, in order to explain my point, I prefer to define two trajectories that can be deducted from the narratives I've collected and documents of the party.

connecting different scales of localities to each other. What is defined is a new form of spatiality against the state spaces. The proposed model concentrates on redefining spatiality via revealing the relationships between inhabitants and spaces. Space, in our case, the neighborhood, is described not as a political tool that can be shaped according to the agenda of sovereign power or the pro-Kurdish party, but as a lively entity which has a capability to shape and be shaped by people.

The other reason is related with the narratives of the inhabitants. While they are answering the question of "what is a neighborhood" or "how do you differentiate your neighborhood from the others", they prefer to differ themselves and their way of existing in the neighborhood from the spatiality definition of the local governance. What they put as a difference is the relations they have developed with the neighborhood after they moved into Hacıahmet. Space is taken not as a "thing" but as a kind of relationality which brings about a form of attachment, sincerity and fellowship. And, to pursue this line has paved the way for me to realize how the relations between local politics as the decentralization model proposes and a certain form of attachment to place is effecting and shaping each other.

Starting from the1970s, people from especially Batman and Mardin, and small amount of Diyarbakır started to move into the Hacıahmet neighborhood, and the three other neighborhoods of Yenişehir, Bülbül and Çukur in Beyoğlu. We can discuss about three waves of migrations as it is emphasized during the interviews. One is around 1970s, the second one is about the middle of 1980s' and the last one is in the mid-1990s and beginning of 2000s. While the first two waves are more related with economic reasons and the urbanization, the last wave is related with the forced migration due to the state violence in Kurdistan (Kurban, 2006; Çağlayan & Özar & Doğan, 2011). What is now experienced, as it is claimed, is a kind of dissolution or

decrease in the Kurdish population in the neighborhood due to the increase in the rents because of Syrian migrants and renewal projects in Tarlabaşı.[63] The stories of migration are important in many ways but what I want to focus on is related to the ties constructed after migration between people and the neighborhood which enable me to understand their motivation to change the locality they inhabit.

At first, I didn't plan to mention about those three other neighborhoods in Tarlabaşı, rather aiming to focus merely on Hacıahmet. However, during my visits and conversation with inhabitants it appears that the physical boundaries defined by local governance which separated one neighborhood from another did not have importance in the inhabitants' relations. While I was trying to ask questions regarding Hacıahmet, a particular neighborhood, the answers got multiplied in spatial terms. People from the same country or generally people from cities of Kurdistan blurred the existing strict boundary based conceptualization of neighborhoods via binding different neighborhoods to one another. As one of the inhabitants claimed, the territory consisting of the four neighborhoods was "like a big village". This link was constructed on the basis of variegated relations such as kinship, economic relations or political affiliations.[64] While asking about a particular neighborhood organization in Hacıahmet, I was inclined to think the neighborhood as the local governance defined it. Hacıahmet neighborhood assembly meant, for me, a political

[63]Since it is not the topic that I can analyze without further analysis, I omit the Syrian migrant issue. However, it is important to state that there is high incidence of expressing despise regarding the Syrians, including the Kurdish inhabitants. It is claimed that the high number of unemployed youth and the increase in the rent are caused by the Syrian migrants. As one of the interviewees says: "Kiralar son zamanlarda iki kat üç kat arttı. Kiralık ev yok denecek kadar az artık. Bunun sebebi de Tarlabaşı'ndan ve Suriye'den buraya göç edenler." (personal communication, December 15,2014)

[64] I don't claim that this situation is unique to the Hacıahmet neighborhood. There is a big literature on how the immigrants create relations among each other in their new "homes" and act in solidarity in order to cope with the ambiguity of the new urban life. For more discussion on internal migration in Turkey, see Çağlayan, Özar & Doğan, 2011; Akhtar, 2010. For the historical background, look at: Duben, 1985; Duben & Behar, 2002.

organization consisting of people from Hacıahmet who gathered for the local issues of Hacıahmet. However, as my interviewees depicted their conceptualization of the neighborhood, it emerged as being quite different than I had imagined. What is called "neighborhood" was not based on a strict boundary, or it was not abiding the definition of local governance; it based itself on the multiple relations among people. The neighborhood, in other words, was redefined regarding the constructed relationships. Thus, there was a neighborhood assembly that tried to include people from all four neighborhoods via imagining it as a big neighborhood.

How do these different neighborhoods connect to one another? Besides any other reasons or explanations, I take migration (including forced displacement) as the meta narrative which has created a special social bond.[65] Migration created a form of relation between Kurdish people due to the togetherness developed against the similar economic, political or alike problems. As one of the women I spoke with explains

> Here in Beyoğlu, you can still have close relations between your neighbors and your relatives. Beyoğlu is now like our homeland. Everybody has migrated here at the same time. Now here, we are all together. If we relocate again, we will miss here. When you look around, you only see your relatives and your neighbors. There is solidarity. It is a place to live. (personal communication, February 8,2015)[66]

As another interviewee explains,

> We used to be scared. It was hard to go out. Now, we defend ourselves better. We know better. We have self-confidence. However, we still think

[65]This relation created by the migration is not peculiar to the Hacıahmet neighborhood. For an early discussion that emphasizes the relations among migration and familiarity based inhabiting, you can check: Duben & Bahar, 2002. Also look at: Çağlayan, Özar & Tepe Doğan, 2011; Üstündağ, 2005.

[66]Komşuluk var, akrabalık var. Yani az çok burası Beyoğlu tarafı bize memleket gibi oldu. Çünkü herkes aynı zamanda göçetti. Hepsi burdalar…. Simdi başka yere gitsek burayı özleriz, memleketimiz gibi oldu burası.Yine bi yandan bakarsın her taraf komşumuz, akrabamız.Birlik var yani. Oturcak yer burası. (personal communication, February 8, 2015)

> go back to our home land. Even just for a day. We could go even today, if it would be possible. (personal communication, February 10,2015)[67]

When one family came to Beyoğlu, it opened up a space for further migration. The migration from the same villages continued as a chain as they explained. Thus, we witnessed very strong kinship relations and quite a large number of families from the same villages of Mardin and Batman. The familiarity, collective inhabiting and a kind of collective longing for the places of origins created a specific sense of locality. Thus, it can be claimed that the shared experience of migration, a kind of adaptation and longing for the places of origin creates a sense of locality (Üstündağ, 2005; Gieryn, 2000). It is a different conceptualization of locality which mixes belonging and longing. In other words, being in Hacıahmet and longing for the place of origin, in a way, are complementing each other. And this mixed relationship should be kept in mind in order to comprehend the attitude toward the neighborhood assemblies. Thus, we can look at how the neighborhood is defined on the basis of a form of belonging and lasting longing for their "original home" in Kurdistan.

What the interviewees understand from neighborhood, then, can be read as a way of constructing a sense of place and locality. As one of the interviewees explains, neighborhood

> When things come to our neighborhood, it feels like kinship or family. I have never defined myself as an apartment person. Because, family relations with whole its purity and spontaneity, even within discussions and fights are nice. The person you have fight might help you in funerals when you lose somebody or you just see them in weddings. The solidarity and family come to my mind when we talk about our neighborhood.(personal communication, December 12,2014)[68]

[67]Daha önce daha çok korkuyorduk.Bir yere gitmek, çıkmak zor oluyordu.Şimdi kendimizi daha güzel savunuyoruz, biliyoruz.Güven var bizde artık ama geri dönmek de var hep aklımızda.Bir gün de ömrümüz kalsa memleketimize gitmek istiyoruz.Yani elimizden gelse bugün bile gideriz. (personal communication, February 10, 2015)

[68]Akraba ilişkisi gibi geliyor bana.Aile ilişkisi gibi geliyor. Ama mahalle dediğin zaman.Yani oldu olası dairelerde oturmaktan yana olmayan biri oldum. Çünkü aile ilişkileri dediğimiz o samimiyet, o

The neighborhood was depicted as a big family with all of its turmoil and "happy moments". What most of the inhabitants I spoke with remarked was that the neighborhood became like a "home" for them. While they changed after moving into a metropolis like Istanbul, they also changed the dynamic of this locality. As they claimed, a new life and new relationality in Beyoğlu forced them to change their way of living compared to what they did in their villages but it also leaves a space open for transforming the existing construe of the urban city. While it was not that apparent before the Democratic Autonomy began to be discussed by the party, the attempt of changing the existing formation of cities outside the Kurdish region appeared as an important area of struggle for the party and the inhabitants.

The neighborhood assembly in Hacıahmet that is begun to be organized can be read as a sign of the "in betweennes": being located in between belonging and longing. The neighborhood assembly, as the party members discuss it, is founded on the basis of participation of neighborhood inhabitants irrespective of political background for the provision of local needs. As one of the activists of Hacıahmet assembly says,

> In fact, the system we called as neighborhood assembly is in the center of these things. We are talking about a neighbor assembly which is going up. When we talk about neighborhood assembly here, I am talking about a community who has a consensus on systematic of assembly's principals. (personal communication, December 8,2014)[69]

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saflık, temiz ilişkiler, birbirleriyle olan münasebetler hatta tartışmalar, kavgaları bile-varsa- bunlar bile hoş aslında.Çünkü bugün bakıyosunuz tantıştığınız birisiyle yarın bakıyorsunuz ki cenaze işlerinde, düğün işlerinde denk geliyorsunuz.Yani dayanışma, bir aile sıcaklığı geliyor aklıma. (personal communication, December 12, 2014)

[69]Meclis sistemi olarak adlandırabileceğimiz sistem aslında şu anda bu işin merkezinde.Yukarıya doğru giden bir meclis siteminden bahsediyoruz..... Burada mahalle meclisi dediğimizde mahallede yaşayan o meclise girmeyi kabul etmiş, meclisin sistematiği, prensipleri hakkında uzlaşmış bireylerden bahsediyorum. (personal communication, December 8, 2014)

In the conceptualization of assemblies, we see the emphasis on pluralism which targets to solve primarily local problems. In other words, locality based necessities are the main issue around which different segments of the neighborhood should get organized. Rather than putting "macro politics" at the center that leads to the underestimation of local needs, the assemblies are claimed to put the everyday life at the center of politics.[70] As it is put; "The main principal of assemblies must be not to expect anything from the state. Each neighborhood assembly has their own approach to their neighborhood. Principals cannot be prepared by common opinion"(Abdullah Öcalan Sosyal Bilimler Akademisi, 2015, p. 83).[71]

Assemblies should have an agenda and particular rules regarding the locality where it is founded. In the locality of Hacıahmet, a "particular rule" emerges that necessitates emphasis on the in between position of the inhabitants; a position in between Kurdish region and Beyoğlu. I think, this positioning of the inhabitants is one of the important factors that define the frame of the politics of Hacıahmet assembly.

In contrast to the state space that treats the neighborhood as a "thing" to be shaped, assembly formation is forced to redefine space on the basis of the tension between belonging to Hacıahmet and longing for Kurdish region. This tension constitutes the neighborhood assembly because it fosters the different meanings attributed to space. The space, neighborhood in our case, is not defined in terms of borders defined by the municipality, but in terms of membership to a particular

[70]While referring to macro politics, I mean the perspective which equates the politics with the parliament. For this perspective, anything rather than the elections or parliamentary politics is regarded as "out of politics". However, in democratic autonomy we have encountered with an expanded understanding of politics. It is expanded in such a manner that the binary positioning of macro politics and local politics is tried to be overcome.

[71]Meclislerin temel düsturu devletten beklememek olmalıdır..... Mahalle meclislerinin kendi yerelliğine özgü yaklaşımlari olmalı, her şeyi genele göre hazırlamak ya da ele almak olmaz.....ilkeler de ona göre belirlenir. (Abdullah Öcalan Sosyal Bilimler Akademisi, 2015, p. 83)

community, Kurdish community. Then, what we are encountered in this new practice of assembly is a new understanding of *spatiality*, a community based spatiality that enables to imagine various links between different geographies. Since the spatial imaginary bases itself on the belonging to the Kurdish community, it goes beyond the borders of the neighborhood; it reaches to the Kurdish region. The Kurdish region does not refer only to the territory within the boundaries of the Turkish nation state but points to the other spaces that the inhabitants have community based ties. As one of the inhabitants say, for instance,

> Until now, we were talking about a system which has been never experienced before. But then, an example from Rojava has been occurred. Institutionalization had first signs in Rojava. Kurd problem has a wide range. It is beyond the national borders.(personal communication, October 4, 2014)[72]

Almost all of the interviews that I made in October and November were mostly turned into a manifestation of excitement of observing a "revolution", as they say, in Kurdish region, Rojava. So, what I come up with as an explanation is related with the imaginary of spatiality that the Kurdish community has. In line with Massey's arguments, what constructs space is the relationships the inhabitants have both with the locality and particular region. This relationality based thinking enables to see the various ties different spaces and territories have but mostly concealed. Therefore, despite the fact that the recently founded Hacıahmet assembly has some "difficulties" in terms of organization and participation, an experience in another country, a country that the inhabitants have community based ties, becomes a great hope. It is a hope for the possibility of an alternative form of self-governance.

[72]Şu ana kadar Kürtler açısından gerçekleşememiş,birebir bizim anlattığımız haliyle gerçekleşememiş, deneyimi olmayan bir sistemden bahsediyorduk ama Rojava örneği oldu. Kurumlaşma ilk nüvelerini Rojava'da göstermeye başladı.Kürt meselesi geniş bir mevzu.Ulus devletlerin sınırlarını aşan bir mevzu. (personal communication, October 4, 2014)

In a nutshell, I take the community based ties developed by Kurdish community as a new way of relating to spatiality. This new form of spatiality defined on the basis of the in-between positioning of the inhabitants: being located in-between belonging to a local and longing for another place. This position can be read as a possibility for the imagining of different ties between various geographies via challenging the boundary based thinking of state centered perspective. The co-existence of belonging and longing blurs the specific boundaries encircling space. A critical terrain is opened up for imagining different ties between material territories. And, since the neighborhood assembly formation tries to construct itself in a locality where we see the predominance of these relationality based conceptualization of spatiality, it needs to reformulate the existing vocabulary of local politics. There is a need for rethinking the existing "local politics" in which the relation between belonging to a locality and belonging to a community are taken into consideration.

3.5 Some last thoughts on critical geography

In this chapter, I try to apply the terminologies used and developed by those from critical geography literature in my discussion of neighborhood assemblies of Democratic Autonomy project. I find this kind of reading interesting and intriguing because I want to read the project from a specific perspective that centers itself on the "alternative spatial imagination". Yet, "alternative to what?" appears as an important area of scrutiny. An alternative to the "state space" or space defined by the territory based nation states that creates palpable confrontations in a Kurdish neighborhood can be taken one of the important answers related to which I can discuss the decentralization in Kurdish Movement.

CHAPTER 4

LOCALIZATION OF MACRO POLITICS:

NEW DEFINITIONS OF LOCAL POLITICS AND SENSE OF BELONGING

Every utopia faces the same problem: What do you do with the people who do not fit in?(Margaret Atwood)

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will focus on the relationship between the constitution of the political and different modes of belongings in Hacıahmet Neighborhood of Istanbul, which is designated as a pilot area of Democratic Autonomy project by Kurdish Liberation Movement.

I will first analyze the politico-spatial frameworks within which the political acts are practiced in the neighborhood. I approach the question of political acts in the neighborhood at two levels: localization of macro politics which means macro-politics at local level, and the local politics which is conceptualized as politics at the local level.[73] The former is mediated by any political action held in the squatter and related to governmental issues, state atrocities, general elections, prison conditions of political prisoners, annual festivals (like Newroz), and commemorations of the martyrs and so on. The decisions regarding the time and form of these political actions are mostly taken by authorities at higher organs of the party. With the politics of the local, on the other hand, I refer to political acts related to the stakes rooted in

[73]It is really difficult to distinguish political actions with categories, yet with those analytical definitions, I aim to present how the vertical and horizontal forms of doing politics are understood.

the neighborhood: that might be a campaign against the demolishment of houses in the neighborhoods, a collectively-run cooperative, a socio-cultural center of the recreational activities of the local, a women's center for the solution of gender-related problems at the local level and so on. The decisions for the politics of the local presuppose a horizontal and localized mechanism. It is not that politics of the local should be completely independent of macro-issues mentioned. What I argue is that when macro politics occurs at the level of the local, it subordinates the politics of the local. The politics of the local is excluded from the purview of the political or articulated as a "subsidiary" area of political struggle. In fact, that is the thing that constitutes a challenge for the democratic autonomy project which proposes neighborhood assemblies to disperse the decision-making hierarchies to the local level.

Secondly, I will show how different political acts in the neighborhood are related with different forms of belonging. What I observed at first place in the neighborhood residents of Hacıahmet is a sense of belonging to a place and longing for original home in Kurdish region. This means we have to think different geographies together. Yet, to elaborate more on this territorial rethinking, I propose a twofold conceptualization of the term of belonging: belonging to an ethnic community and belonging to a locality. Indeed, Democratic Autonomy Project emphasizes the co-constitutive character of these two types of belonging in neighborhood assemblies. Yet, we will see that while many of my interviewees see themselves as belonging to Kurdish community, they come up with an ambiguous or a temporary belonging to the locality of Hacıahmet. I argue that whereas macro-politics at local level recreates the sense of belonging to the Kurdish community, the ambiguous and loose belonging to the local of Hacıahmet by Kurdish political

subjects can be counted as a reflection of domination of macro politics over the local politics.

Lastly, I will discuss in what ways these different forms of politics and belonging at local and community levels project themselves to discourses and practices of the members of neighborhood assemblies. In other words, I will show how the uneven articulation of belonging to the local and the ethnic communities affects the recognition of ethnic multiplicities. Through this discussion, I aim to depict the changing meanings attributed to the notions of politics, locality, party and leadership that are loaded by the history of the long struggle of the Kurdish movement.

4.2 In between the "local" politics and "macro" politics

Democratic Autonomy is the project that acknowledges the multiplicity of needs, values, and concerns. These multiplicities can only be properly recognized when "localization guides the focus of social relations" and "be cultivated through place-based mechanisms of self governance" (Küçük & Özselçuk, forthcoming 2016, p. 12). One of the most important units of these mechanisms is the neighborhood assemblies due to its being the most direct representative of the local.

Assemblies, as it is explained by the activists, should have an agenda and particular rules regarding the locality where it is founded. As one of the activists explains,

> Autonomy proposes governance on the basis of socialist and feminist paradigm within which communities live in accordance to their own language, culture, economy and ecology without disrupting the integrity of the country. How far we can fulfill all of these subheadings is open to question. However, this system is remained at the discursive level.

> Kurdish movement takes certain steps. The system that can be called "assembly system" lies at the heart of this system. We are talking about a bottom up assembly system. The neighborhood assembly is at the centre of this system. (personal communication, January 21,2015)[74]

The neighborhood assembly formation is located at the heart of the envisioned autonomy project. What differentiates the organization of neighborhood from various scales of assemblies is its being the exact representation of the local. The voice of the local is transmitted to the district and then to the region with the help of other assembly formations (Zirig, 2014; Öcalan, 2011a; Akkaya and Jongerden, 2013). In this chain of assemblies, neighborhoods are the main formation through which the specifities of localities will be part of the larger scales of assemblies. In this assembly formation, neighborhood organization is reformulated in an "inclusive" manner via taking the different communities, organizations and mechanisms in the neighborhood into account. As one of the activists defines the assembly, she says,

> The assembly must include people from all different parts: district administrator and co-chairs of the neighborhood assembly, people from institutions, journalists, MKM (Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi), and the inhabitants. The assembly even should include members of AKP and CHP. People who know themselves, organized and care about the problems of the neighborhood had to be a part of the assembly. The neighborhood is like an apartment. Similar to the existence of the apartment administrator that deals with the problems regarding the apartment, the neighborhood needs to be like an apartment. (personal communication, December 17, 2014)[75]

[74]Özerklik, halkların kendilerini dilleri, kültürleri, ekonomileri, ekolojileriyle; o ülkenin bütünlüğünü parçalamadan ve kendi içinde sosyalist,cinsiyet yönünden baktığınızda feminist bir paradigmayla yönetmesini öngörüyor. Türkiyede bu başlıkların tümünü ne kadar geçekleştirebileceğimiz bir sorunsal olarak duruyor önümüzde. Ama bu sistem söylemde kalmayan bir sistem.Kürt hareketi belli adımlar atıyor aslında.Meclis sistemi olarak adlandırabileceğimiz sistem aslında şu anda bu işin merkezinde.Yukarıya doğru giden bir meclis siteminden bahsediyoruz.Mahalle meclisi de bu işin göbeğinde. (personal communication, January 21, 2015)

[75]Mahalle meclisinin ilçe yöneticisi ve eşbaşkanları, kurumlar, gazete, MKM'den tutalım, mahallede yaşayanlardan tutalım.Her kurumdan birileri olmalı.Hatta işte mahalledeki AKPlisinden olmalı, CHPlisinden olmalı.Kendini bilen, örgütlü, gerçekten mahallenin sorunlarına değinebilecek her yapıdan insanların bu mecliste olması gerekiyordu.Nasıl ki bir bina yönetimi varsa ve o binanın sorunlarıyla ilgileniyorsa, mahallede de aynı şey olmalı. (personal communication, December 17, 2014)

In line with the neighborhood assembly definition of the Democratic Autonomy project, she lists the parties, institutions, or independent individuals that must be included in the Hacıahmet assembly. With the inclusion of different groups and parties into the assembly, politics regarding the issues of the neighborhood can be raised. In other words, the neighborhood itself turns into a terrain upon which a particular local politics is practiced which prioritizes the particularities of Hacıahmet. However, the actualization of this proposal is quite different and controversial.

In order to elaborate the controversial actualization of local politics, I propose to look at the politics at two levels. The first one is macro politics at the local, or localization of macro politics as I would like to call, in which the content and form of the political action is mainly determined by the authorities of the party. The second one is politics at the local level in which political acts, their discussion and formulation is rooted in the neighborhood. Informed by this distinction, I claim that what we see in the Hacıahmet assembly is the first form of politics which subordinates the local to the macro politics.

Let's start with looking at some of the political actions organized by Hacıahmet assembly. The first and the most crowded one is the celebration of Newroz. Although Newroz has been celebrated in the Square of Kazlıçeşme, the assembly also organizes a "mini" Newroz in the neighborhood. A mini bus went around the neighborhood, including the other "Kurdish" neighborhoods of Yenişehir, Çukur and Bülbül, and invited the inhabitants to the celebration that would take place in the Hacıahmet Park. The announcements were mostly in Kurdish because the expected participators were only those from Kurdish community. The second event can be taken as the walk with torches in order to celebrate the Rojava revolution. The event continued with the slogans such as "Biji Serok Apo", "Biji Berxwedana

Rojava", or "Biji Berxwedana YPJ",etc. Another event was the walk the inhabitants did in order to draw attention to the KCK prisoners and call for the release of the prisoners. Or, we can talk about the petition for the release of Abdullah Öcalan. These are some of the events I have participated or saw while passing the neighborhood.

What is "local" about these activities? What kind of a local politics is imagined while these activities are organized by the assembly? In order to elaborate on these questions, we can start with analyzing the member profile of the assembly. As opposed to the proposed "pluralist" imagination, we see that the participators of the assembly are only from Kurdish community. Since the assembly begun to get organized in 2014, it seems understandable that as a first step, activists call for those whom they have relation with. As one of the activists puts,

> Now, neighborhood assemblies are established again… Those who are elected for the assembly are the same friends we had in the times of BDP. There are new friends but they are also the inhabitants of the neighborhood. So, there is not much heterogeneity in this sense. (personal communication, February 7,2015)[76]

The existing relations bring about a particular and "traditional" understanding of doing politics as opposed to the assembly model. This old way of doing politics with the same people centered its agenda on the regional issues rather than organization of the local as we can see from the organized activities of the assembly. As another activist claims,

> We (as a party) haven't get in contact with other parts. Our assembly will again comprise only those who have BDP origins. The assembly organization will turn into a party practice.... What the party is doing for instance distributing leaflets, breaking up fights or dealing with the

[76]Şimdi tekrar halk meclisi oluşturuldu….seçilen kişiler yine aynı mahallenin insanı yine BDP'nin zamanndaki eski arkadaşlardır. Yeni arkadaşlar da var ama gene aynı mahallenin insanı onlar da.Pek bir karma durumu yok. (personal communication, February 7, 2015)

> problems took place in the park (Hacıahmet Park). These issues again will remain at the centre of the assembly. In other words, the assembly will concentrate on the problems of the movement not the neighborhood related problems. At least, I think it will be like that. (personal communication, February 8, 2015)[77]

The political activities organized prior to the foundation of assembly are continued without any reformulation under the assembly organization. I claim that the dominance of the regional politics which is highly related with the location of Hacıahmet and its proximity to the central office of the party in Tarlabaşı requires a different conceptualization of local politics.

I propose to name the political framework of Hacıahmet assembly as the "localization of macro politics", macro politics at the local level, rather than reading the activities under the headline of "local politics", politics of the local. It is a way of localizing regional demands in places other than the cities of Kurdistan. The neighborhood assembly that is the embodiment of localization of regional demands becomes the important mechanism which strengthens the ties between place of origin in Kurdistan and a neighborhood in Istanbul via constantly referring to the demands of the Kurdish region.

The present composition of the assembly, pre-dominance of Kurds in the assembly, leads to a kind of formulation of "local politics" that prioritizes the macro political agenda of the party. Rather than providing a terrain where discussions regarding the local issues of Hacıahmet neighborhood are raised, what I have encountered is a political path directed to the issues of regional politics such as liberation KCK prisoners, release of Abdullah Öcalan, right of education in mother

[77]…Parti olarak diğer kesimlerle ilişkiyi kurmamışız ki. Bizim meclis yine BDP kökeninden toplayacak insanları, meclis dediğin yine parti çalışması olacak. …. Partinin ne işi vardır; atıyorum bildiri dağıtmak, bir kavga vardır onu ayırmak, parkta bir sorun vardır.Gene bu kitle bu sorunlara daha çok yoğunlaşacak. Yani mahallenin hakiki sorunlarıyla değil de gene hareketin sorunlarıyla ugrasacak. Yani bana en azından öyle geliyor. (personal communication, February 8, 2015)

tongue, and so on. All of the interviewees I have spoken with told that they have never attended any meeting or demonstrations regarding the neighborhood issues such as urban renewal taking place in Tarlabaşı that may include the Hacıahmet in near future, or insufficiency of primary school, etc. In fact, there is no planning of such activities by the activists. Apparently, the local problems are just problems to talk about, but there is no attempt to change the existing process of politics. As one of the interviewees' explains their perspective on local issues, she says

> Kurdish people migrated because of conflicts in Kurdistan in 90's. Therefore they are used to migrations. As they became self-aware, they do not have political consciousness in local cases. People care *honor* more than urban transformation. That's why, there are demonstrations of the movement rather than urban related problems. And, the inhabitants attended to them. (personal communication, February 8,2015)[78]

There is a certain relation between local politics and sense of belonging to a place. Beside any other reasons such as having a municipality of pro-Kurdish party[79], the main area of struggle in Beyoğlu regarding the self-governance model, the assembly formation, is the hope of going back to Kurdistan one day.[80] And, I claim that it is quite hard to work for the transformation of everyday life proposed by assembly discussions in a place with which you do not have strong relations. "Honor", as the

[78]Bu göçlere alışık bir halk olduğu için, Kürdistan'dan zaten 90'larda o çatışmalarla beraber gelen bir halk olduğu için, yaşam bilinci olsa da politik olarak çok da bilinç sahibi değil yerel konularda. Daha çok halkın önemsediği kentsel dönüşümden ziyade *onur* meselesidir.Bu sebeple de kent sorunlarından çok halk hareketinin eylemleri oluyor ve oraya katılım oluyor. (The emphasis belongs to me). (personal communication, February 8, 2015)

[79]It is the main difference of the assemblies that are trying to get organized in Istanbul. In contrast to the municipalities of Kurdistan where assemblies have relationship with municipalities, in İstanbul, assemblies are trying to get organized under the rule of AKP municipalities. It is a common commented subject by my interviewees. However, I don't have enough data to make analysis on that topic. In order to comprehend the alternative municipality discussions under which assemblies are organized, see: Sümer, 2012; Tuncel, 2013;DTK, 2012.

[80]It is important to remind that this result cannot be generalized to all of those who have immigrated from the cities of Kurdistan to the Western cities of Turkey. As several researches indicate, this situation can be related to the sex and age. As the young women give importance to live in urban cities even if they suffer due to various forms of exclusions (Çağlayan, Özar, &Tepe Doğan, 2011) My interviews point the opposite of that. For further cases look at: Secor, 2004; Garber, 2000; Miranne &Young, 2000.

activist says, is the primary issue; not the changes in the local scale. And the neighborhood assembly, I think, clarifies this line among local and region via establishing dominance of the region over the local. The politics of the local, in other words, is subordinated to the macro politics via positioning local politics out of the political realm. In their conceptualization what makes politics is the concentration on "honor", or macro demands.

Due to the localization of macro politics, the new relations, relations with other communities, and alternative pluralistic community imaginary continue to construct itself on the basis of belonging to the Kurdish region. At this point, it is necessary to focus on the notion of "belonging" due to the fact that a single conceptualization is not enough for the explanation of the macro politics at the local level in Hacıahmet assembly. What I will propose is the existence of two forms of belongings that have dialectical relations with this particular form of doing politics regarding the local observed in Hacıahmet assembly: belonging to an ethnic community and belonging to a local.

4.3 Belonging to a local and belonging to an ethnic community

As I tried to introduce myself to the activists of the neighborhood assembly, I was constantly recommended to look at other neighborhoods where assemblies organized at a certain level. Although I found the Hacıahmet neighborhood more interesting because of the fact that I could witness the first discussions of the assembly formation, I was constantly directed to other neighborhoods in Istanbul. However, it was not some kind of unwillingness to answer my questions. Rather, it was an attempt to show the best example possible in Istanbul to a researcher. Yet, the continuous "encouragement" to participate in the assemblies in Bağcılar or

Esenyurt[81], gains a different meaning with its on-going repetition. What are the conditions for an assembly to be assessed as "successful" or "worthy of analyzing"? I think, the answer to this question is mostly related with the place of the Hacıahmet neighborhood.

In Beyoğlu district, the party designated Hacıahmet neighborhood as one of the four pilot areas to test the implementation of neighborhood assembly. However, being very close to the main headquarter of HDP in İstanbul, in Tarlabaşı, Hacıahmet neighborhood is quite distinctive among other neighborhoods and much more open to the interventions of the politics produced at the central organs of the party.

I claim that the location of the central office in Tarlabaşı changes the direction of local politic via affecting (and sometimes dominating) the everyday practices, decision making mechanisms, the sites of political actions. These, in fact, shift the very definition of the locality, relations with macro politics, or regional politics in our case.[82] While there is complex relationship between the centre and the local that impedes the autonomous empowerment of the local, it also leads to a specific sense of belonging to space. In fact, this specific sense of relationality results in a particular formation of local politics. The emphasis of "local" in local politics is filled with something else. What we have witnessed is the fact that the socio spatial imagination regarding local politics is constructed on the basis of general commonalities emphasized by the party; being a member of a particular community, namely the Kurdish community.

[81] These are some of the main areas in Istanbul where Kurdish movement has strong organizations and active attempts to establish neighborhood assemblies.

[82] In this chapter, I will use regional politics and macro politics interchangeably. This use is important due to the fact that the politics of the party is mainly concentrated on the issues regarding the Kurdish region that goes beyond the national borders of Turkey.

As I tried to explain in the previous chapter, the migration and forced displacement have created bonds between the inhabitants. Migration from the same or close villages and cities in Kurdish populated regions, and experiencing the various ways of forced displacement can be counted as the most important aspect which defines the imagination of a new community in Hacıahmet. It is a community that bases itself mainly on the common longing for a geography or region. And, this longing is tied particularly to the sufferings and glories of a specific ethnic group, Kurds. Thus, it is mainly the *Kurdishness* which creates a sense of belonging to a neighborhood (mahallelilik). And I think the location of the central office complicates the conceptualization of the sense of belonging to the neighborhood due to the constant reference to the political agenda of the Kurdish region. Thus, in order to solve this complexity I propose to differentiate two things from each other: belonging to the local and belonging to an ethnic community.

I would like to separate concepts of belonging to the local and belonging to an ethnic community from each other in order to render the experience of Hacıahmet more comprehensible. However, with this separation I do not claim that they differ from each other strictly. Rather, I aim to categorize the notion of belonging analytically in order clarify my point. For that purpose, I will use the notion of "attachment" in place of the belonging to the local and use "belonging" for the belonging to an ethnic community. I claim that the ties created with the neighborhood of Hacıahmet should be conceptualized as a form of attachment because "belonging" presupposes a form of commitment or dependence; a stronger relationship compared to the notion of attachment. Belonging, as discussed by Fenster with the examples of Palestinians in Jerusalem, is associated with "past and present experiences and memories and future ties connected to a place, which grow

with time"(Fenster, 2005, p. 243; see also: Crang, 2013). In Hacıahmet example, future ties are connected to the places of origin in Kurdish region not to the Hacıahmet neighborhood. Therefore, although certain attachments to Hacıahmet have been created during years, loyalty to the community in Kurdistan precedes the relationships with the neighborhood. Where the inhabitants see themselves belong is the region they migrated from, different parts of Kurdistan. As one of the interviewees says,

> Beyoğlu is like our homeland now. Everyone has migrated here in same time. If you ask me whether I miss there, my answer would be yes. It cannot be our proper homeland. (personal communication, February 13,2015)[83]

Similar to her explanations, another interviewee says,

> I think, we have never accepted to be a part of İstanbul. Since we aware of the fact that we live in exile, we do not feel belonging. Maybe, we always live with the psychology of going back to Kurdistan. (personal communication, February 2,2015)[84]

Although Hacıahmet became a home, it does not take the place of the "original" one that the inhabitants left behind. What most of the inhabitants and activists I spoke with defined as a home is their place of origin in Kurdistan. Hacıahmet, on the other hand, is mostly defined as a kind of "temporary home". Thus, the division between belonging and attachment is quite important because it points to the particular relationality constructed in Hacıahmet that is also backed up by the existence of central office in the district that constantly reminds the ties with the Kurdish region. Although migration and forced displacement are not pertaining to the community in Hacıahmet, what makes their relations with locality distinct is the intrusion of the

[83]Yani az çok burası Beyoğlu tarafı bize memleket gibi oldu. Çünkü herkes aynı zamanda göçetti.Ama dersen şimdi oraya özlem yok mu? Var var tabi..bizim memleket hiçbir zaman olmaz burası. (personal communication, February 13, 2015)

[84]Bence İstanbullu olmayı bir türlü kabul etmedik. Sürgünde yaşadığımızın farkında olduğumuz için zaten kendimizi ait görmedik buraya.Bir gün bir şekilde Kürdistan'a geri dönüş psikolojisiyle yaşıyoruz belki de hep. (personal communication, February 2, 2015)

macro politics in their definition of local. I claim that this weaker sense of belonging to the local, Hacıahmet, and intensified ties with the region, stronger sense of belonging to the ethnic community, results in a specific definition of politics regarding the local which in certain ways challenges the neighborhood assembly project of Democratic Autonomy. Since neighborhood assembly formation is theorized as a mechanism which points to the co-constitution of belonging to the local and politics of the local, the constant emphasis on the belonging to the ethnic community challenges the most important premises of the autonomy project; its emphasis on plurality and recognition of others. In this analysis, I will look at the Hacıahmet assembly and how this separation of local politics from macro political realm affected the founding pillar of the assembly formation; the emphasis on the recognition of others in the chain of equivalence.

4.4 Recognition of "others"

It draws my attention that there is a certain manner of starting to speak about the possible constituents of the assemblies during my interviews. In this particular manner, what is done is to use different communities, ethnic or religious groups in one sentence via separating them with comas such as Kurds, Turks, Armenians, Circassian, Greek, Alevi, etc. It is highly related with the new discursive space opened up after the year of 2003 with the commencement of "democratic pluralism" discussions. As one of the interviewees says,

> It was a Marxist- Leninist movement before. It grounded itself of the Leninist organizational model. However, since the year of 2003, it works

> with assemblies. It has created a bottom-up organizations not the vice versa. (personal communication, October 13,2014)[85]

Within this bottom to top organizational model, a form of equality between different ethnic or religious groups is proposed. In contrast to the previous party activities which concentrate on the solidarity among Kurdish population or consolidation of only the Kurds in Beyoğlu with a class perspective, it is claimed that this new neighborhood assembly experience will be more "inclusive" and will be promoting the equality among differences. However, what kind of formulation regarding equality is proposed? How do they conceptualize the equality of differences from their democratic pluralist perspective? How do they position "others" vis-à-vis Kurdish community? And, what will keep these different communities together despite the differences in terms of history and organizational practices?

Radical Democratic discourse discussed by the party is conceptualized as a new strategy for the Left by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985). Rather than a classical Marxist discourse which defines the social on the basis of class antagonism, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) point to the emergence of "various democratic struggles against different forms of subordination"(p. xix). The antagonisms of various social struggles are particular in terms of their political agenda and formation, but more importantly, they are linked as "equivalent in that they all point to the limit of the dominant hegemonic discourse" (DeLuca, 1999, p. 337). For example, different antagonisms that give rise to feminist struggle, environmentalist struggle, antiracist or ant colonialist struggles all pave the way for the disarticulation of the hegemonic discourse that positions these various groups in

[85]Daha önce hareket Marksist Leninist bi hareketti. Lenininst örgütlenme modelini esas alan bir hareketti. Fakat 2003'ten bu yana meclisler üzerinde; yani üstten doğru değil de alttan yukarıya doğru örgütlenme alanı yarattı. (personal communication, October 13, 2014)

relations to different forms of oppression. What a radical democratic discourse does is to link these diverse democratic struggles that will require "the creation of new subject positions that would allow the common articulation, for example, of antiracism, anti-sexism, and anti-capitalism"(Mouffe & Holdengräber, 1989, p. 42). In fact, it is not only about establishing alliances between given interests, as Mouffe says, but "of actually modifying the very identities of these forces" (p. 44). Thus, both the "very identities" of the forces and relationality among them are reformulated. And, the chain of equivalence will be established where none of the struggles are more important than the others. After defining the chain of equivalence, it is important to establish a "frontier", for Laclau and Mouffe, and "define an adversary, but it is not enough" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. xix). At that point a quite important question appears, what kind of a society do we want to establish informed by these coexistence of multiple struggles?

I take Democratic Autonomy project as an answer to this question asked by Laclau and Mouffe. Looking at my interviews, I claim that activists want to establish a more egalitarian society starting from the neighborhood. And in this imaginary, what they propose is to actualize the motto of radical democratic paradigm: Recognizing differences and creating "chain of equivalence" among diversified communities and struggles.

The Hacıahmet neighborhood is inhabited by mainly three ethnic groups; Kurds, Turks, and Romans. Kurds constitute the main community which has a political party and constant political activities in the neighborhood scale. Although the party activities have been continued for years, neighborhood assembly of Hacıahmet is differentiated from the previous examples due to its increased emphasis

on the recognition of differences. This "recognition" brings about a novel discursive space in which "other" communities oppressed under the power of nation state is taken into consideration as partners. For instance, as one activists expresses,

> ... It's not a problem specific to Kurds; it's the problem of *all oppressed people* which Kurds are also a part of. Our party has already set forth that it could be solved by democratic autonomy. (personal communication, December 5,2014)[86]

Beside the acknowledgment of the range of the problem regarding the governance system that ignores the particularities of the communities of non-Turks, what is proposed is finding solutions together. As it is claimed, it is not only the problem of Kurdish community but all of the communities suppressed in various ways. However, in Hacıahmet assembly, this imaginary towards living together in an equal political atmosphere is formulated mostly by Kurds. To put it differently, although the "recognition of difference" is the primary goal defines the political agenda of Kurdish Movement, its realization is a bit controversial. For instance, as one of the activists says,

> Now, neighborhood assemblies are established again… Those who are elected for the assembly are the same friends we had in the times of BDP. There is no a LGBT individual, nor a teacher, or member of CHP. We haven't contacted with the other parts of the community so far. (personal communication, February 26,2015)[87]

It appeared that there are only Kurdish inhabitants in the assembly. It is a kind of Kurdish assembly which consists of only Kurds who have specific relations with each other coming from the same experiences of migration and forced displacement.

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[86]...Sorunlar sadece Kürtlerin sorunu değil. Kürtlerin de dahil olduğu *tüm ezilen kesimlerin* sorunu.Bunu da demokratik özerk yönetimlerle çözülebileceğini partimiz ortaya koydu. (personal communication, December 5, 2014)

[87]Şimdi tekrar halk meclisi oluşturuldu….seçilen kişiler yine aynı mahallenin insanı yine BDP'nin zamanındaki... Bi eşcinselinden yok, öğretmeninden yok, CHPlisinden yok. Parti olarak diğer kesimlerle pek ilişki kurmadık ki şu zaman kadar. (personal communication, February 26, 2015)

These are mostly members of the previous pro-Kurdish party; some of them even imprisoned due to their political activities. When I was asking questions about the neighborhood assembly, one of the activists emphasized how the Kurdish inhabitants were close to each other. In his explanation of activities of Hacıahmet assembly, he said,

> We work with each and every house in this neighborhood. It's done before; yet didn't work out. Now it is different. It is different because we work in the evenings. We know each other. Whichever door you go in this neighborhood, you will find the door open. Since everybody knows each other here, no problem arises. (personal communication, January 12,2015)[88]

It is important to ask what defines this "everybody" that he talks about. While a sentence before he was talking about the importance of pluralism and how the party has reformulated its politics in an inclusive way, he ends up with an evaluation of assembly as "successful" because everybody knows each other. What he means is not the fact that assembly includes people other than Kurds and they get along; he means the assembly consists of only those who know each other previous to the assembly organization on the basis of pro-Kurdish parties. In relation to that, I claim that the macro politics at the local level in terms of recognition brings about a modified formulation of recognition. Despite the chain of equivalence embedded in the party discourse, in the "localized" version, recognition turns into a form of "naming" of differences. In other words, merely stating that communities are different from each other in terms of culture, language, religion, etc, are taken as if the equivalence among different communities is maintained.

Naming the differences is described as a form of equality by the inhabitants. In one of my interviews, a woman clearly separates her community from the Turks

[88]Ev ev çalışıyoruz. Daha önce de oldu, bozuldu oldu, bozuldu. Şimdiki farklı. Farklı çünkü her akşam çalışma yapıyoruz. Birbirimizi tanıyoruz. Bu mahallede kimin kapısına gidersen git kapı hep açık.burda herkes birbirini tanıdığı için sorun çıkmıyor. (personal communication, January 12, 2015)

who scorn Romans via explaining how they see themselves, Kurds, and Romans as equals. However, I claim that just recognition of the particularities of a community such as culture, language, etc., Romans in our case, does not mean they are equal with Kurdish community. In other words, recognition cannot be equated with equality. Although Romans in our case are "recognized" with their specifities, they are not seen as a part of the neighborhood assemblies. In other words, while the recognition of particularities of different communities occupies an important place at the macro level, it is not localized in the neighborhood due to the domination of the sense of belonging to the Kurdish community over the belonging to the local. The differences among various communities are discursively accepted but this political framework is not localized in Hacıahmet assembly.

While the assembly activists talk about the "other" communities which are aimed to get organized under neighborhood assemblies, they constantly use the word of "invite". This word of "invitation" reveals much about the "recognition of differences" which is promoted by the assembly activists. It is the Kurds who are taken as "hosts" and who can decide which parts can be called to the neighborhood assembly and which cannot. Therefore, I prefer to use "hospitality" rather than equality. The neighborhood assembly of Hacıahmet can be described around the notion of hospitality due to the fact that it is the Kurds who makes preliminary discussions of the assembly organization. After the discussions "reached at a certain point", as one of the activists say, they will start to "invite" other groups, communities other than the Kurdish community. As he explains,

> A strong team will take part in the reconstruction period. Workings will proceed centered around these names, meaning it'll be centric in the first stage. Centrality will be abolished when it's realized in the neighborhoods anyway and what we call as executive power will

> transform itself to be more functional. (personal communication, October 3, 2014)[89]

However, at what point this centralized form of structuring will be changes is still tied to the decisions of the Kurdish activists who, then, commence to call the other groups in the neighborhood. I suggest that it is one of the tensions upon which the assembly organization is founded. Although there are some forms of horizontality among the assembly members in the decision making process, it is a vertically organized process in terms of "inclusion" of different groups. It is not wrong to state that it is a Kurdish assembly where the mere recognition is regarded as equality. And, this statement has also been admitted by the activists of assembly. While the main practice of the neighborhood activists is to make home visits, there are also meetings held in the building of DBP (Demokratik Bölgeler Partisi) in Tarlabaşı. As one of the activist says laughingly,

> So we're planning to realize something with respect to its essence, and include not only Kurdish people but also different parts of society. That's one of the basic hardships in fact; I mean the room speaks for itself. (personal communication, December 19,2014)[90]

The room he is talking about is the main entrance of the DBP building in Beyoğlu where meetings are held. It represents a stereotypic pro-Kurdish party where the poster of the Abdullah Öcalan, flags, and some of the martyrs are hanged on the wall such as Kemal Pir, Mahsum Korkmaz, Sakine Cansız, Mazlum Doğan, and newly martyrs' of Kobane such as Paramaz Kızılbaş and Arin Mirxan. As the activist says, the non-inclusion or non-existence of the groups other than Kurds is one of the main

[89]Bu dönemde yeniden inşada güçlü kadrolar yer alacak.Ve onlar eksenli çalışma devam edecek.Yani biraz ilk etapta merkezi yürüyecek.Zaten mahallelerde oluşturulduğunda artık merkeziyet kırılacak.Yani çok bir ihtiyaç olmayacak.Çünkü yürütme dediğimiz şey kendini işlevselleştirecek. (personal communication, October 3, 2014)

[90]Yani Kürdistanlıların dışında, Kürtlerin dışında farklı kesimleri de dahil ederek özüne uygun bir şekilde çalışma yapmayı düşünüyoruz.Temel sıkıntılarımızdan biri de bu aslında.Yani odanın halinden de anlaşılıyor. (personal communication, December 19, 2014)

handicaps encountered. He laughs when he shows the walls of the room, I think because of the material and detectable incompatibility between how they theorize pluralistic discourse and how it is realized in daily details of the meeting room.

It is important to point to the dilemma that the assembly formation entails. Democratic autonomy project emphasizes the collective creation of an alternative governance and sense of locality via strengthening the ties with the local rather than central bureaucratic state. What makes this proposed collective creation distinctive is its claim to create and recreate a sense of locality, and a form of democratic governance at the end, on the basis of its pluralist tone that takes experience of "others" into account. However, it is uncertain that how far those others desire to be a part of this collective creation process. In other words, different groups may have different visions that they actuate according to their own notions, experiences, and way of livings. And in their particular imagination, the democratizing the governance system may not occupy the main spatial utopia. I claim that if this spatial imaginary on the basis of self-governance does not collectivize its discussion via including the others but only calls others when "the discussions reached a certain point", the autonomy project's main principle of democratic nation, empowerment of ties among the diverse communities, will be unrealized. Related to that, what we see in the Hacıahmet assembly is the fact that the common creation of self governance mechanism does not take place since the strong sense of belonging to the Kurdish community precedes the relations with the locality. The assembly formation, which is the first step for democratic governance, "turns into a classical pro-Kurdish party activity", as one of the activists says.

Activists of Hacıahmet assembly formation propose to organize the participation of all inhabitants in the assembly formation. While social imaginaries of

different groups may be different from each other, what Kurdish movement proposes, I think, is a form of consolidation of various communities around the hegemonic project of autonomy. However, as activists of the assembly explains, this hegemonic "consolidation" is a hard goal to reach and what they do is just to take the first step. What is necessary, in related to the principles of Democratic Autonomy, is to find ways to translate the project's ethical, social, and political principles to other societies rather than positioning "others" as willing communities and political subjects that can be attached to the principles of the project of Kurdish National Movement. Hacıahmet assembly can be read as one of the palpable representations of this necessity of translation that might also change Kurdish community's relationships with the Kurdish region and locality.

4.5 Conclusion

The almost 40 year old history of Kurdish Liberation Movement has obviously resulted in some settled notions regarding the politics and organizational structure. In this settled, or "traditional", way of doing politics with clearly defined mechanisms, local politics has been shaped by the macro politics in cities outside of Kurdish region. However, newly proposed Democratic Autonomy project points to a necessity; a necessity of changing in this political structure. Rather than restricting the political agenda to the regional politics, the autonomy project stresses the importance and necessity of introduction of local realm into the politics. It is the localities starting from neighborhoods upon which a new spatial utopia will be constructed. However, the dominance of the macro politics which concentrates on the Kurdish regional agenda, over the specific localities challenges the stake of the Democratic Autonomy project; creating an alternative pluralistic community via

stressing on the particularities of the localities. What we have encountered in the example of Hacıahmet assembly is the representation of the discrepancy among politics at the macro and local levels due to the constant reference made to the belonging to the Kurdish community. The recognition of the difference of communities is the main political agenda theorized by the party. However, the predominance of the belonging to the Kurdish community in place of the belonging to the Hacıahmet changes the direction of the local politics via making it a satellite of the macro politics that results in an insufficient conceptualization of recognition at the local level. It is a discussion of recognition which merely stays at the macro discursive level rather than being localized and internalized, for now. Thus, what is needed is a rigorous attempt of empowerment of the self governance mechanisms at the local level via deconstructing the dominance of the macro politics over the local. What we see is the first trials of this attempt. It is the first and intriguing attempt of imagining a pluralist democracy; a new exciting utopia.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have studied the project of "Democratic Autonomy" at various levels (such as organizational, programmatic, discursive levels) in order to elaborate how the project is discussed and theorized by the party and implemented in the Hacıahmet neighborhood in Beyoğlu. Or from another perspective, I have tried to elaborate on how a spatial *utopia* is tried be realized in a particular context and how this utopia differentiates itself from and confronts another, statist imaginary.

The discussion in this thesis can be gathered around three lines. First, I study the ways in which the Kurdish Liberation Movement, specifically Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, conceptualizes Democratic Autonomy, secondly, I study how the Kurdish community takes this conceptualization and implements it to a neighborhood in a western city of Turkey, and lastly I inquire into the question of how the community transmits the project to "others" that it aims to reach. These three lines provide an illuminative path to come up with an encompassing analysis on Democratic Autonomy.

At first, in Chapter 2, I look at the determinative shifts which the Marxist-Leninist party, Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, has gone through that provide the setting for understanding the development of the Democratic Autonomy project. I claim that the worldwide changes in the strategy of national liberation movements (from becoming independent state with armed struggle toward "democratic" struggle) and the dissolution of Soviet Union have affected the programmatic of the Kurdish Liberation Movement. Similar to other experiences such as in Latin America, the debates on strategy pointed to a novel necessity, to understand the multiplicity of

struggles that cannot be subsumed under a Marxist-Leninist party's programmatic. Therefore, the party decided both to reorganize itself and reformulate its strategy. What I give importance is the fact the party acknowledged that the mere reformulation of the programmatic was not enough to reach the new aim of developing self-governance mechanisms via democratizing Turkey (discussed under the notion of democratic republic in the chapter). There was also the need of reformulating the existing party structure and its mechanisms. Thus, the party commenced to reorganize itself via distributing its authority among different mechanisms, a process that was accompanied by the new nominations manifesting multiplicity and various forms of unity. Rather than determining the fate of Kurdish communities under the governance of different nation state (in Iraq, Iran and Syria) and claiming itself *the* party, the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan promoted the establishment of parties and mechanisms that would be in line with the needs and particularities of other regions. As Akkaya and Jongerden claim, the party was transformed into a "party complex" via multiplying organizations. However, what is missing in their conceptualization is the emphasis on *spatiality.* Reading and analyzing the party congress documents and defense texts, I claim that, what we observe is not only the heightened number of political organizations and mechanisms, but a new emphasis on spatiality that promotes the development of "localized" or "spatialized" mechanisms. These spatialized mechanisms enable us to understand the discussion of self-governance concretized under the project of Democratic Autonomy. In short, I take reorganization of the party and the programmatic as concurrent happenings: it is a process of permanent re-definition of all the taken for granted notions, mechanisms, and ideologies via valorizing the spatiality and localities.

After explaining the shifts that resulted in the development of the Democratic Autonomy project, in Chapter 3, I focus on how the project is experimented. This chapter can be read, then, as the interpretation of the model by the Kurdish community residing in Hacıahmet neighborhood, Beyoğlu. Following my argument of the spatialization of party mechanisms, I take the democratic autonomy project also as a spatial project. It is spatial because it scrutinizes the taken for granted understanding of space in which space is taken as a "thing" or "container" over which state control is maintained through various mechanisms. Rather, I claim that the project prioritizes the *relationality* among localities and inhabitants. And the particular position of the inhabitants determines their conceptualization of neighborhood that is in contradiction with the statist understanding of space. There is a big conflict between the understanding of space (or neighborhood) by state officials and that of the activists of the Kurdish movement because the state centered point of view attempts to homogenize space in order to control space, or as Lefebvre says, in order to "police" space. However, the decentralization model experienced under the Hacıahmet assembly formation concentrates on the "recognition" of differences intrinsic to the locality. The fabric of localities, for the activists, defines the politics. On the other hand, in Hacıahmet neighborhood, there is a particular relationship with the Kurdish region that influences the construction of local politics discussed under the assembly formation. I claim that there is a constitutive tension between belonging to Hacıahmet and longing for Kurdistan that enables to imagine links between distanced geographies, and this in-between positioning of the inhabitants (in between belonging and longing) results in a specific form of making politics at the local level. So, the question appears: how do we define a new local politics in which the two distinctive characteristics of locality (becoming an alternative to state spatiality and

becoming a new spatiality linking distanced geographies to each other) will be taken into account? As I try to find answers to that question, in Chapter 4, I concentrate on the necessity of redefining and expanding on the notion of "local politics." The particular conditions of Hacıahmet (its proximity to the headquarter of the party and overdetermination of the various forms of belonging) point to the necessity of re-defining politics at the local level. I have called it the "localization of macro politics" due to the predominance of the party politics at the local level. What happens when the macro politics of the Kurdish movement dominates the politics at the local level? I think, the answer to this question bears on the third line of inquiry that I have proposed to discuss in this thesis: the translation and interpretation of the project to the "others" in order to make them a part of the new imaginary of self-governance.

What differentiates Democratic Autonomy project, according to the texts of which I have pursued a discourse analysis, is its entrance into a different political realm by re-defining itself in accordance to the "radical democratic" discourse. This new discursive field points to a new phase for the Kurdish National Movement. It is new because the "national" focus has gained a different meaning. Now, what is at stake is not only empowering solidarities among Kurdish communities (in all four parts of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq) but also developing "hegemonic alliances" with other social movements such as environmentalist movement, feminist movements, LGBTQ movement, or other minority groups' movements. At that point there is a difficult question that emerges: how to create an ethico-political ground through which the communication between different groups is achieved? Since the project is proposed by almost 40 year old national movement, it is received as being overlaid by certain meanings; meanings especially involving hard to transform prejudices against the Kurdish Liberation movement. The Democratic Autonomy project is

claimed to defend “the society against the state” and construct a new democratic nation but what if “this society” (other than members, activists and supporters of Kurdish movement) does not want to be defended by a National Movement? What if the Kurdish Movement’s utopia of organizing a “stateless community” is not the utopia of “others” the movement aims to reach out? So, what can be done is not hoping for a “non-conflictual totality” under a new self-governance project, but to find a common terrain which will not imagine erasing the antagonisms (that is the constitutive force of the societies) (Mouffe, 2005; Clastres, 1987) among communities but to create temporary and permanent alliances with “other” groups. I think, the locality centered politics, not the localization of macro politics, may be the terrain upon which certain commonalities can be reached. It seems like a hard goal to reach due to the settled political frameworks defined and practiced by the 40 year old Kurdish movement such as the leading position of the leadership, and the guerilla organization. However, the Democratic Autonomy project manifests the preliminary attempts of overcoming these hardships by imagining the possibility of other worlds.

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