

ETHNICITY, RELIGION AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR: THE KURDISH
ISSUE IN TURKEY

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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For Esma, Hamza Bera, and Zeynep Nisa

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ETHNICITY, RELIGION AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOR: THE KURDISH ISSUE IN
TURKEY

This study is an examination of how ethnicity and religion affect political behavior of Kurds of Turkey. Despite the presence of some predisposing factors (violent conflict, high ethnic polarization, and significant population size), a substantial portion of Kurds prefer non-ethnic political parties (specifically the ruling Islamist party, the Justice and Development Party) to the pro-Kurdish political parties that have struggled for certain ethnic political and cultural rights. This dissertation systematically and comparatively investigates the ethnicity-based demands (political and cultural) and ethnic identity perceptions of the Kurds who subscribe to either ethnic or non-ethnic political parties. To this end, I have developed a model based on a significant conceptual distinction, derived from the relevant literature, between ethnic category and ethnic group. I demonstrate that membership in the Kurdish ethnic category does not necessarily imply membership in the Kurdish ethnic groups constructed and led by Kurdish political entrepreneurs. More specifically, my argument in this study is two-fold: First, while Kurds generally support ethnic cultural demands, they differ significantly in terms of their political demands. That is, while the overwhelming majority of those who support the pro-Kurdish political parties constitute the Kurdish ethnic groups by sharing the political demands raised by their ethnic entrepreneurs, the majority of those who support non-ethnic political parties do not support these political demands. Second, I argue that there are two forms of Kurdish ethnic identity perception in relation to Islam: secular and non-secular/religious. The Kurds who support the pro-Kurdish political parties as ethnic political groups are more likely to adopt a secular form of Kurdish

identity that has been constructed and promoted by the Kurdish political elites, while those Kurds who support the ruling Islamist party (JDP/AKP) are more likely to display a non-secular form of Kurdish identity.

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Chapter 1– Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The Kurdish issue has been the most pressing problem facing Turkey since the establishment of the republic in 1923. In the early years, some Kurdish rebellions erupted in response to the Kemalist regime's Turkification (*Türkleştirme*) and secularization projects (e.g., the Sheikh Said Rebellion in 1925 and the Dersim Rebellion in 1938), which the regime severely suppressed (McDowall 1996, p. 397). The two decades after the 1930s were relatively quiet as the Kurds did not attempt to confront state authority. With the expansion of political rights under the 1961 constitution promulgated by the military regime, Kurdish intellectuals became involved in literary activities, which included publishing Kurdish-language periodicals, and founded new Kurdish organizations and political parties to articulate and promote Kurdish political and cultural rights (Watts, 2007, p. 53). However, state authorities suppressed all of those activities, delegitimized political parties, imprisoned Kurdish intellectuals, and banned all manifestations of the Kurdish language. In response, in 1978 hardline Kurdish nationalists, especially young Marxist university students under the leadership of Abdullah Ocalan, established the Kurdistan Worker's Party (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*, PKK) with the intent of initiating an armed struggle. The conflict turned violent in 1984 when the PKK, an armed terrorist/guerilla organization, attacked a Turkish patrol in a Kurdish town and killed one soldier. Over the course of last four decades, more than 40,000 people have been killed, thousands more wounded, and thousands of others displaced from their villages and towns because of the war between the Turkish Armed forces and the PKK.

Since 1995, as part of their efforts to join the European Union, Turkish governments have made gradual but significant reforms, including lifting all bans on Kurdish language use, allowing Kurdish political parties to participate in elections, permitting private institutions to offer Kurdish language courses, and more recently establishing Kurdish studies programs at some Turkish universities.

While these democratic reforms did not bring an end to the violent ethnic conflict, there are now two main nationalist Kurdish organizations in Turkey: the PKK and its political wing, the People's Democracy Party (*Halkın Demokrasi Partisi*, HDP). It must be noted that the PKK's political goals have also evolved from independence and unification of all Kurds in neighboring states to a single national homeland, Kurdistan, to a demand for "democratic autonomy" more recently. The HDP, through democratic mechanisms, has pushed for the Kurdish autonomy. However, election results show that a significant portion of the Kurds in Turkey do not support the pro-Kurdish HDP even in light of its much-softened demands. A significant number of Kurds voted for non-ethnic political parties, predominantly for the governing Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP).

Current research indicates that ethnic political mobilizations are successful mainly under three conditions: First, armed ethnic conflicts produce ethnic polarization and ethnic competition, which eventually lead ethnic members to rally around their own ethnic nationalist organizations (e.g., ethnic political parties, armed terrorist/guerilla organizations, and civic associations) (Horowitz 1985, p. 294; Eifert, Miguel, and Posner 2010). Second, geographical concentration of ethnic categories is seen as a crucial factor leading to more ethnic loyalty and support of one's own group (Mozaffar & Scarritt, 2005; Toft, 2002). Third, a strong association is presumed between the demographic size of an ethnic group and the success of its ethnic

political parties (Posner 2005; Chandra 2007; Horowitz 1985), i.e., the larger an ethnic group's population, the more support ethnic political parties receive. Although all these factors are present in the case of Kurds in Turkey (the presence of a violent conflict, geographical concentration, and a large population), a significant portion of the Kurds, contrary to expectations, vote for non-Kurdish political parties. In this sense, the Kurdish case is an empirical anomaly.

To be sure, the fact that a significant portion of the Kurds prefer non-ethnic political parties to pro-Kurdish political parties is a familiar issue in the Turkish intellectual landscape. Although it has not been subjected to adequate theoretical and conceptual analysis, some explanations have been proposed by journalists, academics, and political pundits. The first and widely adopted explanation puts emphasis on the role of ideological factors in shaping Kurdish political behavior. The underlying logic of the argument is that the secular (leftist) political ideology of pro-Kurdish political parties alienates pious segments of the Kurds and pushes them towards the ruling AKP, which extensively employs religious discourse and themes in its election campaigns targeting the Kurdish electorates. This argument is the most common explanation in Turkish intellectual circles, such that Turkish political pundits use the term “pious Kurds” when they refer to the Kurds who support the ruling AKP. The second explanation of this puzzling political behavior emphasizes material factors. The Kurds who vote for the non-ethnic political parties, the argument goes, do this in return for material benefits (Arıkan Akdağ, 2015). In short, while the first explanation of support for the AKP emphasizes ideological incentives, the second credits material incentives. One can also argue for a third explanation, which is that due to the structural and legal limits imposed by the Turkish state (such as higher electoral

thresholds and lack of adequate financial resources for the pro-Kurdish parties during electoral campaigns), pro-Kurdish political parties cannot win the votes they deserve.

All of these factors might be playing a greater or lesser role in the perplexing Kurdish political behavior in Turkey. My objective in this study, however, is not to find out which one of these factors has more explanatory power, but rather to focus on another significant issue. In the related literature, the focus has been mainly on the political and cultural demands as well as the identity perceptions of supporters of Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements and organizations, neglecting those who are not. No study has attempted to examine the Kurds of Turkey as a whole, both those who support pro-ethnic political parties and those who vote for non-ethnic political parties in terms of their political and cultural demands and their perceptions of Kurdish identity. As I will indicate in the third chapter, a significant number of the Kurds fall into this category, meaning that they don't support the PKK or its legal political wing the HDP. In this study I will address the following questions: What significant differences can be identified between the Kurds who support pro-Kurdish political parties and those who support non-ethnic political parties in terms of their political and cultural demands? How do Kurds who prefer non-ethnic political parties differ from those who support pro-Kurdish political parties in terms of their perceptions of ethnic identity?

Argument

The earlier scholars of ethnicity developed and adopted “primordialist” approaches in their efforts to understand the dynamics of ethnic groups, ethnic solidarity, ethnic mobilization, and ethnic conflicts. For example, Olzak (1983), defined ethnicity “as essentially ‘primordial,’ meaning some underlying and fundamental sets of ascriptive characteristics that form a basis of collective sentiment, and under some conditions, collective action” (p.356). From this

perspective, the political salience of ethnic identities is a given phenomenon in the sense that it needs no movers/initiators (e.g., political entrepreneurs) or triggering mechanisms (e.g., economic and political deprivations, cultural denial, etc.). In other words, ethnic groups, according to Primordialist approaches, are unitary actors and inherently salient, members of which have innate attachments to their identities that are acquired through birth, and constantly express solidarity with their co-ethnics (Rabushka & Shepsle, 1972). In his introduction to the collection *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, however, Fredrik Barth (1969) introduced a constructivist paradigm by shifting “the focus of investigation from internal constitution and history of separate groups to ethnic boundaries and boundary maintenance” (p. 10). According to him, it is these boundaries that make cultural differences between ethnic groups visible. Barth’s innovation was that he placed emphasis on the socially and politically constructed nature of these boundaries, which are fluent, not fixed, making switching between ethnic identities possible. Hence, ethnic identities, according to this paradigm, are situational and relational (Barth 1969; Eriksen 2002; Wimmer 2008). As a result, ethnic members can perceive and define the same ethnic identity in different ways with different cultural contents (Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, & McDermott, 2006; Chandra, 2012a; Keyes, 1981). Thus, the argument goes, while political entrepreneurs play significant roles in the politicization of an ethnic identity, the nature of the ethnic identity or ethnic members’ support for ethnic organizations should not be taken for granted (Brubaker, 2002; Chandra, 2004; Kalyvas, 2008; Posner, 2005).

In order to understand the micro dimensions of ethnicity better, scholars from different disciplines have proposed certain conceptual tools (Brubaker, 2002; Chandra, 2012a; Handelman, 1977; Jenkins, 1994; Olzak, 1983; Posner, 2005). Rogers Brubaker in particular makes a distinction between ethnic category and ethnic group, and argues that “groupness”

should not be taken for granted in the study of ethnicity but treated as a variable rather than a fixed or given phenomenon.

I suggest that in order to better understand the nature of the Kurdish case in Turkey, we need a new conceptual model that will help us explore some significant dimensions of ethnicity that existing conceptual tools do not reveal. Brubaker's conceptual distinction between ethnic category and ethnic group is of vital importance in this enterprise because it helps us better grasp ethnicity as both a social process and a political phenomenon. Building on this significant conceptual distinction, I propose a new conceptual model that helps us interrogate first what ethnic category and ethnic group empirically refer to, and second how ethnic members act out their ethnic identities in political and social domains. Social space, as I use the term here, comprises all non-political activities of individuals such as speaking ethnic languages, wearing ethnic clothing patterns, practicing ethnic customs, maintaining traditions, or simply having a strong attachment to ethnic identity. In social spaces, individuals carry out their daily routines and activities without political association or intent, which include speaking their native language and adhering to local clothing styles, customs, and traditions. In political space, on the other hand, they conduct or participate in political activities, which may be formal (e.g., voting for ethnic political parties, running on an ethnic party's ticket) or informal (e.g., joining ethnic armed organizations, providing logistical support for guerilla groups).

I also suggest that for a given ethnic individual ethnic identity might be active or passive in either of these domains. Thus, I propose that an ethnic identification can take four different forms among members of any ethnic category: 1) socially and politically active, 2) socially passive but politically active, 3) socially active but politically passive, 4) socially and politically passive. I further suggest that all those who adopt one of these four forms of identity constitute

the whole of an ethnic category in a specific setting, but only those who adopt politically active forms of ethnic identification (form 1 and form 2) constitute an ethnic group. In this sense, I argue that ethnic group is a subset of ethnic category in terms of the composition of the members. I also argue that each of these forms of ethnic identification is strongly associated with certain ethnic political and cultural demands. In particular, those who adopt politically active forms of ethnic identity are more likely to be on the same page with the ethnic political elites in terms of political and cultural demands as well as with the cultural meaning of the identity.

In light of this conceptual model, in this study I empirically demonstrate that a significant portion of the Kurds adopt either the socially active but politically passive ethnic identification form or the socially and politically passive ethnic identification form. In particular, the ethnic identification form referring to those who adopt socially active (strong ethnic attachment) but politically passive (not supporting ethnic political parties) positions captures the reality that being a member of an ethnic category does not necessarily imply ethnic group membership in the Kurdish case in Turkey, a phenomenon omitted in the extant literature.

As for my second main argument in this study, departing from the constructivist argument that individuals may perceive the same ethnic identity in multiple ways (Abdelal et al., 2006; Ghodsee, 2009; Jacobson, 1997; Schatz, 2004b; Todorova, 1998), I argue that the members of Muslim majority ethnic categories, including Kurds in Turkey, may develop one of two different perceptions of ethnic identity in relation to religion. The first is *secular ethnic identity*, which rules out religion from the cultural content. This modality of ethnic identity defines ethnic identity based on non-religious cultural features such as language, myth of common origin, tribal ties, customs and manners. The second is *non-secular ethnic identity*, which includes religion as an inextricable feature of ethnic identity together with other cultural

characteristics. Thus, I argue that those Kurds who vote for pro-Kurdish HDP are more likely to adopt a secular form of Kurdish identity that has been constructed by Kurdish political elites since 1960, whether or not they are personally religious. I further argue that even the majority of religious supporters of the Kurdish political elites adopt this secular form of Kurdishness. The Kurds who vote for the ruling Islamist party, on the other hand, are more likely to adopt a non-secular Kurdish identity, of which Islam is a significant defining feature.

Data

Surveys

In this study I drew upon data from three surveys and 72 in-depth interviews in order to support my arguments. Two of the surveys were conducted by KONDA, a highly respected Istanbul-based research company in 2010 and 2014. KONDA is an independent agency that has a reputation for its accurate and unbiased election and public opinion polls. The first survey (2010) included 10,393 respondents of voting age from 59 of the 81 provinces of Turkey. Although these data do not represent the current situation in Turkey, they nevertheless provide an opportunity to see how the terms ethnic category and ethnic group may address different phenomena in the Kurdish case. Importantly, the survey was designed to assess how Turkish people reacted to identity issues with a specific emphasis on the Kurdish issue. Thus, the data help us clearly identify the difference between ethnic category and ethnic group in the case of the Kurds in Turkey. The second survey, like the one conducted in 2010, comprising face to face interviews with individuals in a representative national sample, was conducted in November 2014 with 2,464 respondents. I relied on these two surveys to test my conceptual model, presented in chapter three.

The third survey is one I personally designed to measure secular and non-secular perceptions of Kurdish identity, which could not be measured by present surveys in Turkey. To this end, I designed a new questionnaire with a prompt in the form of a dialogue between two friends. Prompt dialogues can be useful in measuring ethnicity or identity-related issues by creating suitable and uniform contexts for the respondents, making it easy for them to formulate their responses (Posner, 2005). I composed this fictitious dialogue based on my observations and informal interviews in the field and my experiences as an insider. In a tape-recorded discussion, two friends, Ali and Mizgin, are exchanging views on how they perceive their Kurdish identity in relation to Islam. While Ali stresses that he sees Kurdishness and Islam as inseparable and Islam as a significant defining attribute of his Kurdishness, Mizgin argues otherwise and stresses that she sees Islam and Kurdishness as two different entities. After listening to this fictitious discussion, respondents were asked questions about the dialogue, including the opinion that they supported. I consider those who agreed with Ali as having a non-secular Kurdish identity perception and those who agreed with Mizgin as having a secular Kurdish ethnic identity.

I conducted this survey in the summer of 2014 with 288 respondents, who were selected through a stratified quota sampling method. My goal was to produce a representative sample of the voting-age population in each of the four research sites within Istanbul in which the survey was being conducted. The criteria for the quotas were age (equal to or greater than 18 years old, the minimum age for voting in Turkish elections) and gender. As for age, I selected my informants from three age categories (18-28 years old, 28-43 years old, and 44+ years old) categories that divide the Turkish population into almost three equal-sized groups. Major public opinion polls in Turkey also select these age categories in their research.¹

¹ For the prompt dialogue and the questionnaire, please see appendix.

I selected my respondents at random until I completed the age and gender quotas for the day. Six respondents were interviewed daily in each district over a period of 12 days (total 72). To avoid snowball sampling, I or my research assistants² walked some distance after each interview before approaching the next potential respondent. We introduced ourselves to respondents as researchers who investigating Kurdish perceptions of identity. When we asked them whether we could ask them a couple of questions about their opinions on the issue, almost all willingly participated in the survey. When potential respondents expressed their unwillingness to participate in the survey, we thanked them for their time and found another respondent. Also, because we were administering the survey in a metropolitan setting occupied by people from different ethnic categories, we occasionally approached potential respondents who turned out not to be of Kurdish origin. Again, we thanked them and found appropriate respondents.

In-depth Interviews

The survey research was complemented by 72 semi-structured interviews, which provided an opportunity to learn more about informants' deeper feelings, insights, identity perceptions, and ethnicity-based demands and expectations. Because, for the sake of generalization, structured surveys limit informants' ability to discuss questions at greater length by providing bounded choices for responding to questions, a more qualitative approach was necessary to explore any opinions or other factors affecting informants' perceptions of identity not covered by the survey instruments. Interviews, however, allowed informants to express their views in their own words and so could provide a fuller understanding of their perceptions and opinions.³ I selected informants for in-depth interviews based on two criteria. First, I chose those

² My research assistants were Serhat Kantarkıran, Ömer Aygöl, Nihal Genç, and Faruk Erdoğan

³ For the interviews I used the same prompt dialogue and the questions presented in appendix but in an open-ended format to encourage interviewees to expand their views.

who were eager to speak about Kurdish identity issues in Turkey. Second, among these I selected informants who were more knowledgeable about identity issues. In this process, I followed Bernard's (2011) definition of key informants as "people who know a lot about their culture [or the identity perceptions, political and cultural demands of the Kurds in the context of this research] and are, for reasons of their own, willing to share all their knowledge" (p. 150). For instance, I considered those who were members of either the pro-Kurdish HDP or the ruling AKP to be "key informants" because they represented solid positions in terms of party preferences. Probing their motives and insights added to the quality and richness of the ethnographic data that I obtained through surveys.

At the beginning of my research I was planning to record my interviews, but when I was in the field I realized that recording made informants feel uncomfortable even though they consented to be recorded. Thus, I gave up and took notes instead. When informants expressed views that sounded interesting for my research I sometimes asked them to repeat their answers in order to make sure I wrote them down accurately. I conducted 50 interviews in Istanbul and 22 interviews in Diyarbakir, a pre-dominantly Kurdish city that is the stronghold of Kurdish activism in Turkey. While I focused my study on Kurds living in Istanbul, I also wanted to gain insights from Kurds who lived in settings with a predominantly Kurdish population such as Diyarbakir.

Research Sites

I conducted my surveys in four districts of Istanbul, which is the most populous city in Turkey (18.2 percent of the country's total population lives in Istanbul). In addition, it contains the largest Kurdish population of any city, even Kurdish-majority cities, in the country. I chose

these sites based on certain criteria. To administer my personally designed survey in 2014, I carefully examined the results of the last general elections (in 2011) to identify appropriate districts within Istanbul for data collection. I first checked for the vote shares of political parties in each districts of Istanbul to locate those that approximately reflected the national vote share of each party. Based on this criterion, I singled out four districts in Istanbul, Arnavutköy, Sultangazi, Sultanbeyli and Sancaktepe, known to host significant Kurdish populations, as the most appropriate sites for my study. I then closely examined the election results for every neighborhood within these districts to determine the vote shares of political parties to locate those that approximated the national vote shares of the parties. Based on this criterion, I designated three neighborhoods in each of these four districts as the sites of data collection. Thus, I collected survey data in twelve neighborhoods within four districts of Istanbul.

Plan of the Dissertation

In the second chapter, I propose my conceptual model based on Brubaker's conceptual distinction between ethnic category and ethnic group. I review previous studies regarding conceptual issues in the study of ethnicity. After sketching the existing conceptual debates within the literature, I present a conceptual model that proposes four forms of ethnic identification: socially and politically active, socially active but politically passive, socially non-passive but politically active, socially and politically passive. I discuss what each of these forms of ethnic identification refers to and what inferences we can draw from them in terms of the cultural and political demands espoused by members of each ethnic identification.

In the third and fourth chapters, I apply my conceptual model to the Kurdish case from both macro ve micro perspectives. In chapter 3, I first discuss the most visible and significant cultural features of the Kurdish ethnic category – i.e. language with multiple dialects, religion

with multiple sects, and tribal ties, by drawing on previous ethnographic accounts. Then, I discuss the strategies Kurdish political elites have used to construct a Kurdish ethnic group out of the Kurdish ethnic category since the inception of Turkish republic in 1923. More particularly, I examine how strategic use of violence by the PKK has helped it establish a viable Kurdish ethnic group that seeks certain political objectives in Turkey.

Chapter 4 includes the application of the conceptual model from a micro perspective. In the first part of the chapter, I evaluate the electoral performances of pro-Kurdish political parties as an indicator of ethnic groupness. By applying my conceptual framework to the Kurdish case, I will reveal the fact that ethnic identification is not fixed but processual and fluid in the sense that individuals can switch between four ethnic identification forms. I also empirically illustrate that a significant number of the Kurds in Turkey distance themselves from the nationalist Kurdish political organizations (the PKK and its political wings) despite the fact that this number increases or decreases over the years, meaning that being a member of the Kurdish ethnic category does not automatically make someone a member of the Kurdish ethnic group in Turkey. In the last part of the chapter I test central expectations of my model by drawing on two nationally representative survey data.

In chapter 5, I develop another theoretical framework for examining how ethnic political elites develop a particular perception or form of ethnic identity in terms of cultural content. The main argument in this chapter is that when ethnic entrepreneurs embark upon the construction of an ethnic group out of an ethnic category by mobilizing ethnic members for certain political objectives, at the same time, they start a process of negotiating the meaning of their ethnic identities. They propose and promote a particular form of ethnic identity by defining the cultural features that they want their followers to accept as the content of their identity. Based on this

theoretical framework, I discuss the secular and non-secular perceptions of ethnic identity that primarily emerge in Muslim societies.

In chapter 6, I examine how Kurdish political entrepreneurs have constructed a secular Kurdish identity since the 1960s based on myths of common origin and common history, an identity that rules out Islam as a defining element. Initially, Kurdish entrepreneurs adopted a hostile stance against Islam, which they portrayed as an agent of colonial exploitation. By characterizing Islam as a foreign organism within the Kurdish cultural body, they promoted the idea that it has nothing to do with genuine Kurdish identity. More recently, to expand their support base among the Kurds, they have softened their radical stance and developed a friendly language towards Islam. This friendly language, however, is a rhetorical strategy and does not indicate a deviation from the secular Kurdish ethnic identity that has been shaped since 1960s.

In chapter 7, I show that there is an identifiable difference in their perceptions of Kurdish identity between the Kurds who support pro-Kurdish political parties and those who support the ruling AKP. Ethnic elites have been successful in putting their followers (the members of the ethnic group they constructed out of the Kurdish ethnic category in Turkey) on the same page in terms of the cultural content of Kurdish identity that they have proposed and promoted since the 1960s. The most striking point is that the overwhelming majority of the pious Kurds who support the pro-Kurdish political party, in contrast to those pious Kurds who support the ruling AKP, also adopt this secular Kurdish identity promoted by the Kurdish entrepreneurs. In the last chapter, I discuss main findings, theoretical significance and limitations of this project.

Chapter 2 – Ethnic Identity in Social and Political Domains: A New Conceptual Model

Proper concepts are needed to formulate a good theory, but we need a good theory to arrive at the proper concepts (Kaplan, 1964, p. 53).

Introduction

For any scholarly enterprise, one of the major tasks is to establish a conceptual vocabulary that clearly conveys analytical narratives to the readers. This is mainly the case for theoretically driven studies. This clarification of founding concepts usually proceeds in one of two ways. First, one can simply predicate on the conceptual vocabulary that is already established in the literature. This is a common practice, especially in fields that have reached reasonable consensus on the definitions and uses of key terms, as all fields eventually do. The established language of a field, however, may not serve situations in which current empirical realities of the phenomenal world necessitate conceptual and semantic innovations to maintain correspondence between phenomenal and semantic fields (David Collier & Levitsky, 2009; Sartori, 1970).

In this study, I follow the second path by proposing a conceptual model that aims to explore and understand how ethnic identification takes shape among the Kurds of Turkey. Some prominent scholars of ethnicity have suggested new conceptual classifications, an attempt to refine the conceptual tools in the field for more productive and accurate analyses of the empirical reality (Brubaker, 2002; Chandra, 2012a; Olzak, 1983; Posner, 2005). I build a conceptual model on conceptual distinction made by Rogers Brubaker between ethnic category and ethnic group. Brubaker proposes that ethnic groups emerge from ethnic categories and they are politically oriented corporate identities. Groupness is taken for granted in the literature of ethnicity, something that blinds analysts to the processes and dynamics of ethnic group formation in the empirical world (Brubaker 2002). Brubaker takes ethnic group as something variable, not as

fixed or given. He emphasizes that there are many examples of failed ethnic group formation attempts that are ignored by the extant literature. This conceptual distinction opens ways to explore the microdynamics of ethnicity. Based on Brubaker's conceptual distinction, I propose that ethnic identification can take four forms in terms of the ways ethnic category members perform their ethnic identities in social and political domains: 1) socially and politically active ethnic identification, 2) socially passive but politically active ethnic identification, 3) socially active but politically passive ethnic identification, and 4) socially and politically passive ethnic identification. I suggest that these identity forms help us better understand the relationship between and the implications of the terms ethnic category and ethnic group at individual level of analysis. Activeness of ethnic identification form may stem from affective or instrumental reasons, depending upon context or situation.

This chapter includes three sections. In the first section, I will critically examine the conceptual progress in the field of ethnicity by showing a line of cumulative conceptual refinement that is the state-of-the-art in the literature. In the second section, I will provide new definitions of a set of concepts including the conceptualizations (operationalization and measures) of these terms for empirical use. In the third section, I will construct a new conceptual model based on the concepts formed in the second section that help us better understand how members of ethnic categories use their ethnic backgrounds in political and social domains.

Ethnic Category and Ethnic Group: An Innovative Conceptual Distinction

The situations of discrepancy that might appear between present conceptual tools and the empirical space are very well articulated or rigorously addressed in the literature of social science methodology. The pioneer of this enterprise in the field of comparative politics is Giovanni Sartori who has set the standard for the subsequent studies in his classical work

Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics published in 1970. Sartori (1970) constructs his analysis of concept formation on the basis of two important conceptual categories. The first one is “conceptual traveling,” which refers to the capacity of a concept to successfully travel across different empirical contexts in that the concept’s meaning maintains its integrity when it applies to different cases. This is, however, not a taken for granted objective. Conceptual categories do not or cannot always travel across different empirical settings without possible distortions taking place in the correspondence between the concept and its empirical referent. Hence, Sartori (1970) suggests political scientists to be cautious when they apply concepts to the contexts that display significant differences from the original contexts in which the employed conceptual categories were formed. Otherwise, there might emerge a critical methodological problem that Sartori calls “conceptual stretching,” which is the second foundational concept in the Sartori’s analysis. This serious methodological problem arises when one conceptual category is applied to cases that are actually not within its the empirical coverage. Sartori (1970) remarks: “in order to obtain a world-wide applicability the extension of our concepts has been broadened by obfuscating their connotation. As a result, the very purpose of comparing – control – is defeated, and we are left to swim in a sea of empirical and theoretical messiness” (p. 81).

The recent scholarship on concept building strategies and ensuing frameworks have thoroughly analyzed the use of various social science concepts such as ideology, culture, revolution, and democracy for the sake of conceptual accuracy and clarity.⁴ Although no study has attempted to apply Sartori’s strategies to the concept of ethnicity and its sub-categories, some recent political science studies of ethnicity that focused on conceptual issues reveal instances of

⁴ See the following studies Gerring (2001), Gerring and Barresi (2009), Kotowski (2009), and Collier and Levitsky (2009) for insightful analyses of the social science concepts of ideology, culture, revolution, democracy respectively.

conceptual stretching in the related literature (Brown & Langer, 2010; Chandra, 2006; Fearon and Laitin, 2000). In Chandra's (2006) words: "Many comparative political scientists do not define the term before using it, and those who do often classify an identity as ethnic even when it does not correspond to their own definitions" (p. 398).

These conceptual problems have arisen especially in three points. First, when some political scientists scrutinized the congruity between existing conceptual tools and the cases coded as ethnic groups by large data sets they found that proposed definitions do not accurately cover these cases (Chandra, 2006, 2012b; Fearon & Laitin, 2000). In other words, existing definitions "imply the exclusion of cases that intuition says are ethnic groups, and the inclusion of cases that intuition would like to rule out" (Fearon & Laitin, 2000: 10; Fearon, 2004). In order to fix such problems, some scholars have attempted to propose a new all-inclusive definition of ethnicity that would cover all existing cases coded as ethnic by the existing data sets (Chandra, 2006, 2012a), or some others have proposed a new definition of ethnic group that aims to rule out cases that intuition says they are not ethnic groups (Fearon & Laitin, 2000).

Second, some scholars have found an inconsistency between the theoretical paradigms adopted and the nature of concepts employed (Brubaker, 2002, 2009; Chandra, 2012b). Every theoretical paradigm has conceptual tools that reflect or carry with themselves its major assumptions. According to Chandra, existing theories of ethnicity, although they claim to adopt the constructivist paradigm, have been developed on primordialist concepts that neglect the constructed nature of ethnic identities by implicitly assuming that ethnic identities are fixed and singular (Chandra, 2001, 2012b). Brubaker (2004) similarly notes that "essentialism [primordialism] has indeed been vigorously criticized... Yet we often find uneasy amalgam of constructivist language and essentialist [Primordialist] argumentation" (p. 33). In order to avoid

this contradiction, he suggests, analysts need unambiguous analytical categories/concepts (Brubaker, 2004, p. 29). For instance, Brubaker (2004, p. 44) problematizes the use the term identity for it refers to “a condition rather than a process,” which presumes a perfect fit between “the individual and the social.” He, instead, suggests the term “identification.” He (2004, p. 44) suggests that identification refers to a complex process that calls attention to diverse variables that can shape self-identification of individuals. To this end, Brubaker and Chandra suggest certain new concepts that denote processual, relational and fluid character of ethnicity.⁵

Third, these conceptual problems come to the surface especially when analytical focus shifts from macro perspectives that take ethnic categories or groups as units of analysis (Bates, 1973; Birnir, 2007; Cederman & Girardin, 2007; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Reynal-Querol, 2002) to microanalytical ones that focus on individuals or everyday uses of ethnic identification (Barth, 1969; Brubaker, 2002; Chandra, 2004; Cohen, 1969; Laitin, 1986; Posner, 2005). Empirical observations of everyday ethnicity clearly indicate that ethnicity is constructed, and its utility contextual (Brubaker, 2002, 2004; Posner, 2005; Shahrani, 1984), relational (Chandra, 2012b; Eriksen, 2002), multiple and fluid. The analytical shift from group level to individual level ethnicity has forced scholars to employ conceptual tools that are well suited to observe the constructed nature of ethnicity on the ground (Brubaker, 2002; Chandra, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Keyes, 1981; Posner, 2005; Wimmer, 2002, 2008). Recent political science, sociological and anthropological studies on ethnicity are largely concerned with everyday ethnicity; we, as an outcome, have seen a sustained attention given to conceptual tools in the related literature, conceptual tools that need to accurately links semantic field to the empirical domain.

As part of this empirical and practical concerns with regard to the relationship between

⁵ For more information see, Brubaker (2004) and Chandra (2012b, 2012a).

concepts and everyday ethnicity, analysts developed conceptual frameworks that are sensitive to ethnicity on the ground. In order to better understand the way individuals perceive and practice their ethnic identities, some conceptual distinctions have been made between ethnic category and ethnic group (Kasfir, 1979; Brubaker, 2002), ethnic structure and ethnic practice (Chandra & Wilkinson, 2008), identity repertoire and identity choice (Posner, 2005). Ethnic category, ethnic structure and identity repertoire (as defined by Kasfir and Brubaker, Chandra and Wilkinson, and Posner respectively) correspond to “the distribution of descent-based attributes—and, therefore, the sets of nominal identities that all individuals in a population possess, whether they identify with them or not” (Chandra & Wilkinson 2008, p. 523). But identity choice, ethnic group or ethnic practice refers to a certain level of ethnic attachment individuals have and to ethnically oriented political behavior.

The distinction Brubaker makes between ethnic category and ethnic group is of vital importance for this study. It is not simply a conceptual distinction but a research program suggesting a new approach to the study of ethnicity. Brubaker (2002) notes that two main conceptual approaches dominate the literature. The first is the “groupist approach,” which tend to define ethnicity in groupist terms in the sense that it “treats ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed . . . As if they are internally homogeneous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes” (Brubaker, 2002, p. 164). In other words, according to Brubaker, extant literature takes groupness as a given and constant phenomenon not as something variable. Against the groupist approach, some authors (Cohen, 1978; Jenkins, 1997; Wimmer, 2008), predominantly anthropologists, adopt the “processual understanding of ethnicity,” which avoids offering any definition of ethnicity, ethnic group, race or nation because they believe that any given definition

“presupposes the existence of a bounded entity and invites us to think about that entity in substantialist [groupist] terms” (Brubaker, 2009, p. 29). Instead of explaining what an ethnic or racial group is, these writers adopt a “processual understanding of ethnicity” to grasp “how ethnicity, race, and nation work” (Brubaker, 2009, p. 29).

Brubaker attempts to resolve this issue by offering an important conceptual distinction. He suggests that an analytical distinction must be made between the terms ethnic category and ethnic group to isolate and measure groupness as a variable, a conceptual approach that aims to combine the processual and groupist understandings of ethnicity. Ethnic categories, according to Brubaker (2002), may have different levels of groupness ranging from none to high. He defines ethnic groups as “a mutually interacting, mutually recognizing, mutually oriented, effectively communicating, bounded collectivity with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity and capacity for concerted action” (Brubaker, 2002, p. 169). Based on this definition he classifies “Hungarians” and “Romanians” as ethnic categories and “the Hungarians” and “the Romanians” as ethnic groups. “Hungarians” and “Romanians” do not act as a coherent group, yet “the Hungarians” and “the Romanians” do have a certain sense of groupness. Because scholars of ethnicity largely pay attention to the successful examples of ethnic groupness, Brubaker argues, they fail to detect, in many cases, the failed group-making efforts of ethnic entrepreneurs. Thus, he suggests taking “groupness” as a variable rather than as a constant.⁶ In fact, he takes a radical stance and suggest that the term ethnic group should not be used at all in the studies on ethnicity. To be sure Brubaker is not the first writer who uses the term ethnic category, for example Barth (1969), Handelman (1977), Tajfel (1981), and Laitin (1998) use the term ethnic category.

⁶ Defining ethnic groups as politically oriented entities is not a new phenomenon. Anthropologist Abner Cohen (1969) was one of the earlier authors that raised this point. However, he does not make a distinction between ethnic category and ethnic group.

However, Brubaker's innovation is that he makes a distinction between ethnic category and ethnic group. Richard Jenkins (1994) also makes a distinction between ethnic category and ethnic group. In his conception ethnic category refers to the identity imposed by discriminating outsiders and ethnic group to self-identification. In this study, I adopt Brubaker's conceptual distinction.

Ethnic Category and Ethnic Group

In this section I aim to achieve two interconnected objectives. My first objective is to deal with the terms ethnic group and ethnic category. I suggest that Brubaker's conceptual contribution is a significant one, yet the terms ethnic category and ethnic group can be developed further for making them useful for empirical analysis. Thus, I will first define and conceptualize these terms. My second objective is to develop a conceptual model that illustrates the relationship between and the implications of ethnic category and ethnic group at individual level. In other words, this theoretical model will help us figure out possible ways that ethnic individuals practice or perform their ethnic identities in relation to the terms ethnic category and ethnic group.

The scholars of ethnicity either define the same phenomena with different concepts or different phenomena with the same concepts. If we take a cursory look at the literature, it appears that writers employ multiple terms to refer to the same phenomena. This inevitably causes conceptual confusion. For instance, the terms ethnicity, ethnic group, ethnic category and ethnic identity all, more or less, are being interchangeably used (with some exceptions) to mean the same thing: "simply a cluster of individuals who share a descriptive label" (Chandra, 2012b, p. 9). Among these terms, ethnicity is the umbrella concept, from which other terms (such as ethnic category, ethnic group, ethnic identity) derived. Writers generally do not conceptually

differentiate the umbrella term from its derivatives or the derivatives from one another.

To be sure, there are many possible systematized concepts that can be derived from the umbrella term ethnicity as Chandra points out. In this study, however, I will only deal with the terms ethnic category and ethnic group that are foundational for the conceptual model I will develop in this study.

Ethnic category and ethnic group

Brubaker (Brubaker, 2002) suggests scholars of ethnicity to problematize the relationship between ethnic category and ethnic group in order to better understand actors, strategies, and counterstrategies in ethnic group-formation processes. This requires us to define and operationalize these terms.

I take “ethnic category” to mean a class of persons who share a categorical label (based on certain attributes such as language, dialect, religion, sect or skin color). Category members *do not necessarily* share common interests or think of themselves as a collective” or as a group [emphasis added] (Chandra, 2012b, p. 9). Here, it must be reemphasized that members of ethnic categories do not necessarily have a sense of groupness or collectivity, they may form an ethnic group but, in general, sense of groupness is not a given phenomenon for ethnic categories. Members may “consider themselves, and be considered by others, as culturally distinctive” (Eriksen, 2002, p. 42). They may also activate ethnic networks, for instance in job market by preferring members of their own ethnic category. Yet, ethnic networks are in many cases not activated as a function of “overarching organizations” but on an individual basis. In other words within ethnic categories “ethnic network [can be] decentralized and broken down into dyadic relationships: it has no [does not necessarily require] organizational nexus” (Eriksen, 2002, p.

42). In Brubakers (2004) words, “it should be clear that a category is not a group. It is at best a potential basis for group-formation or groupness” (p. 12).

Some recent constructivist studies (Gorenburg, 1999; Petersen, 2012; Posner, 2005) document that the state (or political authorities including colonial administrations) can form new ethnic categories for certain political objectives. This has two patterns. The first pattern is to form completely new ethnic categories with new labels in order to divide larger ethnic categories into smaller ones. For instance, the Soviet authorities created Moldovan ethnic category in order to prevent Romania’s influence on Romanian-Speaking people in Bessarabia region of the Soviet Union. “Moldovans [Romanian-speaking subjects of the Soviet Union] were told that they spoke their own language, not Romanian. Accordingly, the alphabet was changed from Latin to Cyrillic” (Petersen, 2012, p. 392). Eventually, Moldovan ethnic category came into existence.⁷

The second pattern is to put different ethnic categories together to form larger ethnic categories. British colonial administration in Zambia, for instance, created incentives for tribal groups to define themselves with languages they speak in order to make Zambians more and easily manageable. Thus, four larger ethnic categories based on four different languages emerged (Posner, 2005; Prince, 1980). However, political authorities cannot create ethnic categories from scratch. They just map onto existing cultural attributes that are created by the everyday practices of ordinary people. All ethnic categories, thus, require a cultural content. Membership rule for ethnic categories, however, have nothing to do with these cultural contents (Chandra, 2012a; Fearon & Laitin, 2000). One needs not to subscribe to cultural content of an ethnic category in order to be a member. I discuss this issue with a greater detail in chapter 4.

⁷ On categorization from above see Slezkine (1994), Brubaker (1994), and Torpey (2000).

Analysts, especially those who employ quantitative methods, tend to develop general measures for membership rules that can apply to all ethnic categories. This is basically about setting measures that successfully distinguish members of ethnic categories from non-members. To this end, some approaches have been proposed within the related literature. Chandra classifies three membership rule approaches. The first one is, what she (2012a, p.109) calls, “cultural rule for membership,” which is suggested by Barth (1969). According to Barth, membership rule is not independent from individuals’ decisions. Simply put, membership to an ethnic group, argues Barth (1969, p. 15), requires persons to “declare their allegiance to the shared culture of” that ethnic group. In Barth’s understanding, subscription to cultural content of ethnic category is a requirement for membership. Fearon and Laitin (2000) propose another membership rule, which measure membership by looking at parentage. According to them, category memberships of parents or ancestors determine one’s ethnic category membership. Chandra offers a third approach that she calls “attribute descent rule.” She (2012a) asserts that “members of ethnic categories are distinguished from nonmembers by the descent-based attributes they possess” (p. 109). In this study, I adopt parentage as a measure for the membership to Kurdish ethnic category. In Kurdish case, category memberships of parents are a good measure to determine Kurdish ethnic category membership because in the Turkish context the ethnic origin of parents is taken seriously by people in determining their ethnic category. An individual whose parents are of Turkish and Kurdish background has a right to claim membership to the both of these ethnic categories. I discuss this issue in the third chapter.

As for the term “ethnic group”, according to Brubaker (2002), ethnic groups are constructed and politicized by ethnic political entrepreneurs on the basis of “a mutually interacting, mutually recognizing, mutually oriented, effectively communicating, bounded

collectivity with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity and capacity for concerted action” (p. 169). In this sense, “ethnic group” refers to a coherent group of people who come together for a political purpose (ranging from independence to political autonomy) on the basis of a homogenously perceived ethnic identity derived from an ethnic category. That is to say, successfully formed ethnic groups more or less put their members on the same page in terms of ethnic identity and political goals. Ethnic groups emerge only after political entrepreneurs deliberately construct and politicize a particular ethnic identity out of an ethnic category in order to mobilize a group of people for a political end.⁸ Without the presence of an ethnic category, ethnic groups cannot emerge; hence, political entrepreneurs cannot construct ethnic groups from scratch.

I want to put a caveat here. The way Brubaker defines ethnic group makes it harder to empirically measure ethnic groups. The attributes of groupness proposed by Brubaker (such as mutually interacting, mutually recognizing, mutually oriented and effectively communicating members) cannot even apply to smaller units such as family. Brubaker conceptualizes ethnic group in a way that it is almost impossible to be empirically operationalized. He proposes ethnic group as an ideal type. An exact congruity between ethnic members in terms of interaction, recognition, political goals, and communication hardly exist in the real world. In fact, this is hardly surprising given the fact that Brubaker radically suggests scholars of ethnicity to abandon the term ethnic group altogether. However, I strongly believe that the distinction between ethnic category and ethnic group is a significant contribution and these terms can successfully be empirically operationalized. Instead of searching for a complete congruity between ethnic members and political elites in terms of interaction, orientation and political goals, we need to

⁸ On the role of ethnic entrepreneurs in the construction of ethnic groups see Melucci (1995) and Martin (1995).

look for a more relaxed congruity. Conceiving ethnic groups in this way will give the term an empirical applicability.

Ethnic entrepreneurs develop and pursue different strategies for ethnic group formation in response to political contexts where “ the formal rules, regulations, and policies that structure social and political interactions” (Posner, 2005, p. 2). In other words, political institutions and contexts have significant impact on ethnic group formation, especially on the strategies ethnic entrepreneurs pursue for this end. It is possible to argue that there are two general patterns in terms of how the state deals with ethnic group formation. The first pattern is that the state tries to inhibit ethnic entrepreneurs to mobilize members of a minority ethnic category within the formal political structure. It may either repudiate the existence of a minority ethnic category altogether by suppressing any public visibility of its cultural content (such as language, dress, music, faith), or only prohibiting any ethnic political parties running in the elections. This pattern seeks to prevent ethnic entrepreneurs to form an ethnic group out of an existing ethnic category. For instance, Turkish state had long repudiated the existence of Kurdish ethnic category and claimed that there are no Kurds but “mountain Turks.” Hence, political activities of Kurdish entrepreneurs were harshly suppressed for a long time (McDowall, 1996). Iranian state, despite admitting the presence of Kurdish ethnic category as a separate ethnic category, has banned Kurdish political activism as well (Martin Van Bruinessen, 1986; Entessar, 1984; Helfgott, 1980). It is possible to propose that in such institutional environments; ethnic political entrepreneurs are more likely to resort to violence as a means for ethnic group formation. The second pattern is that the state allows ethnic entrepreneurs to operate within formal political structures, that is, they are free to found ethnic political parties along present ethnic cleavages. Second pattern involves different institutional frameworks. Different electoral systems (i.e,

plurality electoral systems, proportional representation) and party systems (i.e., single party systems, two party systems or multi-party systems) have variable impact on ethnic group formation (Chandra, 2004; Posner, 2005).⁹

I suggest that one can empirically deal with ethnic category and ethnic group from two different levels of analysis. The first one is macro level analysis that takes ethnic category and ethnic group as collectivities (not necessarily coherent as far as ethnic categories are concerned) by focusing on their cultural contents, social and political organizations, and historical trajectories. For instance, a macro level analysis of an ethnic category is expected to discuss its defining attributes such as cultural mores, traditions, economic activities, social relations, faith, language and geographical locations. In this sense, it is anthropologists that generally provide us with fine-grained ethnographic accounts of ethnic categories. A macro level analysis of ethnic groups, on the other hand, generally examine the conditions, processes and objectives of ethnic group formation (including group making tactics of ethnic political elites) in relation to institutional/contextual opportunities or constraints. Political science studies of ethnicity are more concerned with this dimension.

That being said, if we take ethnic groups as something variable or happening instead of fixed or constant, as Brubaker suggests, how, then, can one measure the presence or absence of an ethnic group from a macro perspective? Although not clearly explicated, Brubaker suggests

⁹ In addition to political institutions that create various incentives for ethnic group formation, previous studies indicate that certain variables facilitate ethnic entrepreneurs' job in mobilizing ethnic members for certain political goals. These facilitating variables can be listed as geographical concentration of ethnic categories (Fearon, 2004; Laitin, 2004; Posner, 2004; Toft, 2002; Weidmann, 2009) economic and political deprivation (Gurr, 1970; Horowitz, 1985); population size (Chandra, 2007; Posner, 2005; Posner, 2004b; Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972); institutional structures of countries, such as regime types, electoral systems, and power sharing (Birnie, 2007; Horowitz, 1985; Lijphart, 1977; Posner, 2005; Van Cott, 2005; Wilkinson, 2006); and modernization (Barth, 1969; Hecter, 1975; Olzak, 1983; Young, 1979). Ethnic entrepreneurs take advantage of these dynamics in their efforts to mobilize the members of their ethnic categories for pursuing certain political agendas.

that a complete correspondence between ethnic members and ethnic political elites in terms of political objectives (of course with an action for achieving these objectives) is a requirement for an ethnic group to emerge. As I discussed above, according to him, there must exist a complete congruity in terms of ethnic identity and political goals. According to Brubaker, even high voting share of ethnic political parties by itself is not an indicator of ethnic groupness. For instance, although virtually all ethnic Hungarians in Romania vote for the pro-Hungarian political party, Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), for Brubaker it is still not possible to talk about the presence of a Hungarian ethnic group in Romania because many Hungarians do not share the political objectives of the Hungarian political elites (Brubaker, 2002, p. 180). They do, Brubaker argues, vote for the ethnic party not because they have a strong sense of groupness but because they have no other options.

To be sure, Brubaker is right when he suggests that those who vote for a pro-ethnic political party do not necessarily share the political objectives of the ethnic political entrepreneurs or have a strong sense of groupness. However, it is still possible to argue that there is a positive relationship between voting for a pro-ethnic political party and sharing its political objectives as I empirically show in chapter three. In other words, ethnic members who vote for an ethnic political party are more likely to share the political objectives of ethnic entrepreneurs, forming an ethnic group striving for certain political goals. Thus, since I conceptualize ethnic groups as politically oriented following the lead of Brubaker (2002), it is reasonable to measure ethnic groupness based on presence or absence of ethnic political organizations (such as insurgent organizations or political parties), with significant bases of support, that seek to mobilize ethnic members for certain political objectives. If such an organization with a

significant support base is present, it means that an ethnic group is in place.¹⁰ To put it simply, in order to speak about the presence of an ethnic group, I suggest that ethnic organizations that are supported by a significant portion of the members of an ethnic category must be present, no matter if those who vote for or support ethnic political organizations completely share political objectives of ethnic political elites or not. I suggest that what matters is the capacity of the ethnic elites in gathering a group of people among the members of an ethnic category who acts toward the same political end. Thus, I find it useful to take voting share as an indicator of ethnic groupness.

The second one is micro level analysis that deals with ethnic category and ethnic group from an individual level perspective. By micro level analysis I mean exploring and employing techniques for measuring ethnic category and ethnic group membership at individual-level. A micro level analysis requires specifying membership rules (either by researchers or the facts on the ground) for both ethnic category and ethnic group. For measuring ethnic category membership I will follow the lead of Fearon and Laitin (2000) who measure ethnic category membership by looking at parentage.¹¹ According to them, category memberships of parents or ancestors determine one's ethnic category membership. "In ordinary usage," they maintain, "to ask 'what is her ethnicity?' is to ask about what ethnic group [ethnic category in my conception]

¹⁰ I differ from Brubaker on this point as well. According to Brubaker, organizations are not ethnic groups, or do not represent ethnic groups. In my approach, ethnic organizations (such as rebel organizations, ethnic political parties, civil society organizations) are good indicators of ethnic groupness. Ethnic political elites aim to mobilize ethnic members through organizations they found. Thus, ethnic groups center around ethnic organizations. It is these ethnic organizations that set political agendas for their members or followers. For instance, the PKK and its political wings in Turkish political landscape lead the political demands of the Kurds who support them. However, I must note that ethnic organizations cannot be equated with ethnic categories. The PKK and the pro-Kurdish political party can be equated with Kurdish ethnic group but not with the Kurdish ethnic category. I make this point clearer in the third chapter.

¹¹ Note that Fearon and Laitin do not make a distinction between ethnic category and ethnic group, thus they offer this measure for ethnic groups. However, I use this measure for ethnic category membership.

her parents (or other close ancestors) were assigned to” (J Fearon & Laitin, 2000, p. 13). It is a nominally possessed right based on certain criteria such as descent-based attributes (Chandra, 2012b) or parentage. In other words, members of ethnic categories are eligible for membership even if they don’t claim to be. For instance, someone who was born to Azeri parents in Iran, she or he nominally possess a right to claim membership for the Azeri ethnic category, no matter if she does not desire to be. This gives us the population sizes of ethnic categories.

Membership rule for ethnic group differs from that of ethnic category. For one to be a member of an ethnic group one needs to fulfill two requirements. First, one must be a member of a particular ethnic category. Category membership is a necessary condition but not sufficient one for ethnic group membership. Second, one has to support (ranging from having sympathy for to actively involving in) ethnic political elites and organizations (including warring organizations or political parties) that struggle for certain political ends. This second criterion is a function of a sense of groupness. Note that being eligible for membership to an ethnic category does not necessarily make someone a member of an ethnic group. Support for ethnic organizations that pursue certain political goals is required for ethnic group membership as well.

As for the subscription to the cultural content, I propose that adopting or performing cultural content of an ethnic group is not a requirement for ethnic group membership; yet, unlike ethnic category membership, there is a strong correlation between subscription to cultural content of an ethnic group and ethnic group membership. In other words, members of ethnic groups are more likely to adopt or perform cultural content (such as customs, traditions, language, sect, religion, symbols) of their ethnic groups. For instance, some anthropological accounts empirically indicate that “the accretion, symbols, myths, customs, traditions etc., ...become most important in regard to organized ethnic communities [ethnic groups]” (Levine,

1997, p. 16).

Ethnic groups are subsets or derivatives of ethnic categories. Thus, there are two possible scenarios in terms of the relationship between ethnic category and ethnic group. First, ethnic categories without ethnic groups may exist in certain contexts. For instance, Chewa and Tumbuka are two ethnic categories in Zambia, but no Chewa and Tumbuka ethnic groups that pursue political interests emerged in the country. In other words, there are no political organizations, through which Chewas or Tumbukas translate their ethnic identities into the political space due to their small population sizes that hinder the politicization of these identities (Posner, 2004). Bambara, Fula and Sonrhail ethnic categories in Mali also lack politically oriented ethnic groups due to some strong common inter-ethnic ties (Dunning & Harrison, 2010). Second, some or a few members of ethnic categories (political entrepreneurs) may successfully form ethnic groups out of their ethnic categories. There are numerous examples of successful ethnic group formations in all around the world. One of the most interesting things about ethnic group formation is that in some cases multiple ethnic groups may emerge from the same ethnic category in the same environment, as it is the case of Kurdish ethnic category in Iraq. Or, one ethnic group may emerge from two or more ethnic categories. Some political entrepreneurs in the north Indian state of Punjab successfully politicized a “Punjabi” identity in order to mobilize Sikhs and Hindus together based on common cultural features in 1997 elections (Chandra & Boulet, 2012, p. 250).

In the next section, I propose conceptual model that explains the forms an ethnic identity takes among the members of ethnic category and ethnic group. This proposed model on the bases of the distinction between ethnic category and ethnic group has a capacity to shed light on some ignored or omitted points that existing political science literature fail to explore or ignore

altogether.

A new conceptual model

It is now common in the literature that ethnic identities are socially constructed and fluid despite their “sticky characters” (Chandra, 2004). The constructed nature of ethnic identities implies that they are formed in a particular historical process by the everyday practices of ordinary people and/or by political institutions (in the case of ethnic categories) or by the activities of ethnic political entrepreneurs (in the case of ethnic groups). The second widely held theoretical premise is that ethnic identities, that is, personal attachments to ethnic identities may weaken or harden overtime, meaning that they are not inherently salient. Any conceptual analysis or conceptualizations must contain or cover the constructed and fluid qualities of ethnic identities. To this end, I develop a model explaining the possible forms that ethnic identities may take in an ethnic setting among ethnic individuals.

I assume that ethnic identities and the forms they take among ethnic members can be observed mainly in two societal domains. The first one is social space, which contains the everyday lives of individual members, simply their daily routines that have nothing to do with politics. In other words, social space, the way I use the term here, contains all non-political activities of individuals such as speaking ethnic languages, ethnic clothing patterns, performing ethnic customs and traditions. The second one is political space that includes all political activities of ethnic members. These activities may be formal (i.e., as voting for ethnic political parties, running on ethnic parties’ ticket) or informal (i.e., joining ethnic armed organizations, providing logistical supports for guerilla groups). I suggest that an ethnic identity might be active or passive for a given ethnic individual in these domains. Thus, I suggest that an ethnic identity can take four different forms among members of any ethnic category: 1) socially and politically

active, 2) socially passive but politically active, 3) socially active but politically passive, 4) socially and politically passive. I argue that first two forms refer to what Brubaker calls “groupist forms of self-understanding” and the last two forms designate what Brubaker (2004) calls “more loosely affiliative forms of self-understanding” (p. 46). Individuals adopt and switch between these ethnic identification forms due to contextual, affective or instrumental reasons. Political contexts particularly important in shaping ethnic members preferences in terms of preferring one ethnic identification form to others.

1) Socially and politically active ethnic identification. An ethnic identity is socially and politically active for a particular individual if she has a strong attachment to her ethnic identity and supports pro-ethnic political organizations (such as voting for ethnic political parties, and/or joining insurgent organizations). Violent or nonviolent ethnic conflicts are more likely to force members of ethnic categories to adopt this form. For instance, the overwhelming majority of Turkish minority in Bulgaria embrace this form by voting for Movement for Rights and Freedom Party, which claims to represent Turkish minority in the country (Fish, 2006). The majority of Hungarian minority in Romania adopts this form of ethnic identity as well. They, almost as a block, vote for the Democratic Alliance of Romania (Craiutu, 1995). In violent forms of ethnic conflicts, those who join, provide logistic support or have sympathy for insurgent organizations also adopt this form of identity.

I hypothesize that those who adopt this form of ethnic identification are more likely to be on the same page with the ethnic political entrepreneurs in terms of political and cultural demands.

2) Socially passive but politically active ethnic identification. An ethnic identity is socially passive but politically active for a person if she has weak attachment to her ethnic background but votes

for ethnic political parties or joins collective ethnic movements. Those who adopt this form of ethnic identity view themselves belonging with minority ethnic category yet do not or cannot perform cultural elements of ethnic category. This type of ethnic manifestation is rare but not non-existent. For instance, Giuliano (2000, 2011) indicates that the pioneers of Tatar nationalism were those Russified urban Tatar elites who did not know Tatar language due to assimilationist policies of the Soviet Union. Similarly, some Kurds in Turkey who cannot speak Kurdish and do not practice any cultural elements of their ethnic category or have weak attachment to their ethnic background, vote for pro-Kurdish political party. (Brenneman, 2007, p. 46). Especially, in consociational democracies like Lebanon, this form can be more visible due to the fact that the design of the system obliges ethnic members to support political organizations that represent their ethnic category although they personally have weak attachment to their ethnic backgrounds.

I hypothesize that those who adopt socially passive and politically active ethnic identification are more likely to be on the same page with the ethnic political entrepreneurs in terms of political and cultural demands. But with a lesser extent compared with the form 1.

3) *Socially active but politically passive ethnic identification.* An ethnic identity is socially active but politically passive for a person if she has a strong attachment to her ethnic identity but does not translate her ethnic identity into political behavior. In other words, those who adopt this form of ethnic identification have strong attachments to their ethnic identities yet for some reasons – i.e., affective, instrumental or ideological, they do not support ethnic political organizations. This form of ethnic identification is an omitted one in the existing literature of ethnicity and civil war. As Kalyvas (2008) puts, it is assumed that if one adopts politically passive ethnic identity, one has weak attachment to one's ethnic identity. However, this is a misleading conclusion. For instance, some significant number of the Kurds in Iran and Turkey who have strong attachments

to ethnic identity keep distance from Kurdish ethnic organizations that struggle for Kurdish political rights. Moreover, although 60% of Scots define themselves as Scots, only 20% percent of them voted for Scottish National party in two consecutive elections held in 1992 and 1997 (Chandra, 2007: 9). Similarly, caste identity is more likely to be socially active but politically passive for Sri Lankans. Although they have strong attachment to their castes, yet they do not translate their caste identities into political behavior. It plays a very limited role in political space in comparison with religious and linguistic identities (Chandra, 2012b, p. 12; Tambiah, 1986). Giuliano (2000) also observes in Russia's Republics that "individuals may possess an extremely strong ethnic identity and sense of group [I would prefer the term category here] belonging, but this belonging does not necessarily translate into support for nationalist politics" (p. 296). What Giuliano argues here refers to, what I call, the socially active and politically passive ethnic identification form.

Various reasons can lead ethnic members to adopt each of these forms of ethnic identification. Political context can be one reason in the sense that political authorities can make it extremely costly for the members of minority ethnic categories to involve in ethnic political activities (such as voting for pro-ethnic political parties and supporting insurgent organizations). Despite having strong attachment to their ethnic backgrounds (socially active), ethnic members might not politically activate their ethnic identities in order not to face serious consequences. Second, ethnic members can instrumentally adopt this form of identity. For material interests, or in order to get access to material benefits, they can distance themselves from ethnic political organizations. Third, ideological reasons (the ideological differences between ethnic political entrepreneurs and ethnic members) can lead ethnic members to adopt this form of ethnic identification.

I hypothesize that those who adopt socially active but politically passive ethnic identification form are more likely to support ethnic cultural demands but less likely to support political demands that ethnic political elites raise and promote.

4) Socially and politically passive identification. An ethnic identity is socially and politically passive for some potential members of an ethnic category who do not subscribe to the cultural attributes of their ethnic category, have attachments to their ethnic identities, or support any ethnic political organizations. Ethnic individuals that adopt this form of ethnic identification have no attachments to ethnic identity, even they might not identify with their ethnic background. In other words, those who adopt this form of ethnic identification possess a right to claim membership in ethnic category but prefer not to identify with their ethnic background. Certain political and social contexts may play roles in leading ethnic members to adopt this form of ethnic identification. In situations where dominant ethnic categories have inclusive membership rules may increase the number of ethnic members who adopt this identification form. Turkey is a case in point. As I will show in the third chapter, due to inclusive ethnicity regime of the country, many people who have right to claim membership in Kurdish ethnic category identify with Turkish identity. Or, strict and brutal assimilationist policies of some authoritarian regimes may lead some ethnic members to adopt this ethnic identification form.

I hypothesize that those who adopt socially active and politically passive ethnic identification form are more likely to be indifferent to ethnic political and cultural demands that ethnic entrepreneurs raise and promote.

		Socially Active	Socially Passive		
	Politically Active	Form 1 • support for ethnic collective movements including ethnic political parties and armed insurgent organizations • strong attachment to ethnic identity • supporting ethnic cultural and political rights	Form 2 • support for ethnic collective movements including ethnic political parties and armed insurgent organizations • weak or no attachment to ethnic identity • supporting ethnic cultural and political rights	Ethnic Group	Ethnic Category
	Politically Passive	Form 3 • no support for ethnic political movements including ethnic political parties and armed insurgent organizations • strong attachment to ethnic identity • Supporting ethnic cultural demands	Form 4 • No support for ethnic political movements including ethnic political parties and armed insurgent organizations • weak or no attachment to ethnic identity • No ethnicity-based demands		

Table 2. 1. Four forms of ethnic identification

Extant literature measures the saliency of ethnic identities on group level and focuses solely on the political saliency of identities on macro level. For instance, in a place where there is an ethnic political party with a considerable base of support, or an insurgent ethnic organization maintaining a war against political authorities, that particular ethnic identity is considered to be politically salient. However, this macro level approach runs the risk of ignoring the fact that a significant portion, or even the majority of the members of that ethnic category might not adopt politically salient ethnic identity form on the individual level, as it is case for the Kurds of Turkey. Thus, combining macro and individual levels of analysis is conducive to more accurate empirical outcomes. Table 2. 1. displays what I discussed so far about the four forms of ethnic identification.

We can derive a couple of theoretical insights from this conceptual model. First, individuals that adopt these four forms of ethnic identification as a whole constitute the size of an

ethnic category. To put it another way, members of an ethnic category in a place are distributed among these forms with the possibility of some forms having no members at all. However, only those who adopt first two forms (politically active forms) should be considered as the members of ethnic group. Recall that I define ethnic groups as politically oriented collectivities. Thus, those who adopt socially and politically active, and social passive but politically active identification forms constitute the membership composition of ethnic group. In this sense, ethnic group is a subset of ethnic category.

There are four probabilities here in terms of the relationship between ethnic category and ethnic group. The first probability is that the presence of an ethnic category in a place does not necessarily entails the presence of an ethnic group as Brubaker (2002) suggests. An ethnic category may exist without an ethnic group. We can infer two conclusions from such situations. First, no ethnic political entrepreneurs arise to construct an ethnic group for political ends. This happens especially where the population of an ethnic category is not large enough to create an effective political block. Posner (2004), for instance, convincingly documents that Chewas and Tumbukas in Zambia, due to their small sizes, did not form any ethnic groups on the basis of any political organizations seeking political ends. Second, ethnic political entrepreneurs are in place, but their efforts for constructing an ethnic group end up with failure. For instance, Kurdish political entrepreneurs in 1960s and 1970s attempted to mobilize the members of Kurdish ethnic category in Turkey through some ethnic political parties, civil society organizations, and literary activities yet they failed to reach their goals due to suppressive measures of the state (Bozarslan, 2005). In such environments, ethnic category members adopt either socially active and politically passive ethnic identification (form3) or socially and politically passive identification (form 4), namely politically passive forms of ethnic identification find no space in such environments.

Second probability is that category members may form an ethnic group by virtue of the activities of some ethnic political entrepreneurs. They may create ethnic political organizations that successfully muster support from the ethnic category members. Yet, the majority of the ethnic members do not join the ethnic group. This is a significant issue that is generally ignored by the existing literature. If this fact is ignored, the elites of such ethnic groups may assume an undeserved position to represent the larger population of the ethnic category. In other words, a small number of ethnic members may assume a position to represent a larger population, over which these individuals have, in fact, no real representative powers. This is the case for the Kurds of Turkey. One reason that produces this illusion is the political authorities' failure to realize this fact on the ground. Their indiscriminate treatment of the members of minority ethnic categories empowers ethnic political elites' representative capacity.

Third probability is that, like second one, category members may form an ethnic group by virtue of the activities of some ethnic political entrepreneurs. They may create ethnic political organizations to pursue some political goals as well. Yet unlike the second probability, this time the majority of the members of ethnic category join the ethnic group to support ethnic political organizations for certain political ends. In this situation, the groupness level of the ethnic category is high in terms of the number of members because the majority of the members of the ethnic category join the ethnic group. In political systems where power is devolved to subnational/ethnic units, as it is the case in ethnofederal systems, that make the presence of interethnic political movements nearly impossible (Anderson, 2014; Horowitz, 1985), ethnic category members have no option but to adopt politically active forms of ethnic identification. Also, in political settings where majority and minority ethnic categories are culturally distant, the

overwhelming majority of the minority ethnic category adopt politically active ethnic identification forms as it is the case for Arabs in Israel, Turks in Greece etc.

Fourth probability is that there may emerge an almost perfect match between ethnic category and ethnic group in the sense that all members of the category are at the same time the members of the ethnic category. In such situations, ethnic entrepreneurs successfully mobilize all the members of their ethnic category for a political end. This is of course an ideal-typical scenario that may not have any empirical equivalence. Or in settings where ethnic political parties win nearly all ethnic votes can exemplify this scenario. If there is ever a case of this scenario, it can be observed in cultural and political contexts where majority and minority ethnic categories are extremely polarized, culturally distant, and the state's institutions have no interest in finding collaborators from within minority ethnic categories.

Second, these four ethnic identification forms do not refer to rigid, constant, and fixed positions in the sense that switching between them is always possible for ethnic members. For instance, one can switch from a politically passive identification form (form 3 or form 4) to politically active one (form 1 or form 2) and vice versa. For instance, the changing voting rates of ethnic political parties can be seen as an indicator for this scenario. Or, one can switch from a socially passive identification form to socially active one (form 2 to form 1 or form 4 to form 3). Some events might trigger this move. Being exposed to indiscriminate violence of the state can lead ethnic members to switch from socially passive identification form to socially active one. For instance, one of my informants who previously supported Turkish nationalist party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) switched from socially and politically passive form of ethnic identification to socially and politically active one when he was brutally beaten by a group of

Turkish nationalist college students. Personal or structural reasons can play significant roles in this respect.

Conclusion

The conceptual model I develop in this chapter contributes to and builds on Brubaker's conceptual distinction between ethnic category and ethnic group. It helps us empiricise these two concepts at both macro and micro level. First, it can help us observe or measure the terms ethnic category and ethnic group, which, I propose, refer to different empirical phenomena, at the macro and micro (individual) levels of analysis—i.e., collective (categorical/group) use vs personal utilization of identity as a cultural/symbolic resource. Following Brubaker's lead, this conceptual model indicates that ethnic groups are not fixed or given, yet variable entities emerging from ethnic categories. It is ethnic elites that instrumentally construct ethnic groups out of ethnic categories and it is ethnic individuals that instrumentally or affectively provide support, i.e., voting for ethnic political parties, joining or providing logistical supports for ethnic insurgent organizations, for the construction of ethnic groups. Second, this conceptual model proposes that ethnic category membership does not necessarily imply an ethnic group membership. Thus, it indicates that membership rules in use within ethnic categories and ethnic groups are different. In contexts where ethnic identities are politicized and ethnic polarization is high, this point gains vital significance. In such contexts, ethnic category membership is by and large mistakenly equated with ethnic group membership by outsiders. This puts all the members of an ethnic category under the tutelage of ethnic political elites. Thus, it gives us an advantage to see the distinction between Hungarians or Kurds (ethnic category) and the Hungarians or the Kurds who make instrumental uses of their identity as ethnic groups. Strong ethnic attachment does not necessarily drive ethnic individuals to support ethnic political organizations.

In the third and fourth chapters, I will put flesh out on the theoretical discussion I postulate in this chapter. In the second chapter, I will examine Kurdish ethnic category and Kurdish Ethnic group from a macro level analysis. This will include both the discussion of main cultural attributes of the Kurdish ethnic category that have been socially constructed by the practices of ethnic category members and the examination of the strategies, actors and processes of the formation of a Kurdish ethnic group over the years. In the fourth chapter, I will apply the conceptual framework I develop in this chapter to the Kurdish case in Turkey from an individual level perspective by showing how this framework can explore significant issues on the ground. I will show that a significant portion of the Kurds stay away from pro-Kurdish political parties that are striving for political autonomy for the Kurds.

Chapter 3 – A Macro Level Analysis of Kurdish Ethnic Category and Kurdish Ethnic Group

In the second chapter, I provide a new conceptual model that analytically distinguishes between the concepts ethnic category and ethnic group, and that indicates four possible forms of the ethnic identification that ethnic category members may adopt in a particular ethnic setting. The significance of this new conceptual model is that it helps us clearly understand the essential characteristics of ethnic categories and ethnic groups, and related issues –i.e., empirical and theoretical differences between ethnic categories and ethnic groups as well as how individuals make use of their ethnic backgrounds in social and political domains. In this and next chapter, I will provide an analytical narrative of the Kurdish issue in Turkey by drawing on the conceptual framework developed in the previous chapter. I will not give a mere chronological or descriptive account of the issue that indicates only its historical trajectory, but analytically examine it in light of the conceptual model I propose, an analytical approach that reveals some blind spots in the study of ethnicity that were overlooked in the extant literature.

I suggest that one can deal empirically with Brubaker's conceptual framework with two different levels of analysis. The first is macro level analysis that treats ethnic category and ethnic group as collectivities (independent of what ethnic members think or do) by focusing on their cultural contents, social and political organizations, and historical trajectories as known to the outside analysts. For instance, a macro level analysis of an ethnic category is likely to address such attributes as cultural mores, traditions, economic activities, social structures, faith, language and geographical locations. Such investigations are generally conducted by anthropologists, who provide fine-grained ethnographic accounts of ethnic categories.¹² A macro level analysis of an

¹² The following studies exemplify this type of work that provide in-depth ethnographic examinations of the Kurdish ethnic category in terms of language, religious affiliations, tribal structure, economic and other social institutions: Leach (1940), Barth (1953), Besikci (1969), Bruinessen (1992).

ethnic group, on the other hand, examines the conditions, processes and objectives of ethnic group formation (including the group-making tactics of ethnic political elites) in relation to institutional opportunities or constraints. Political scientists are more likely to be concerned with this dimension.¹³ The second level is micro analysis that deals with ethnic category and ethnic group from an individual level perspective. By micro level analysis I mean analyzing individual-level data by employing techniques for delineating ethnic category and ethnic group. That is, a micro level analysis requires specifying membership rules for both ethnic category and ethnic group, something that is missing in Brubaker's analysis

In this chapter, I will provide a macro level analysis of the Kurdish ethnic category and Kurdish ethnic group in Turkey. As it will be clear in this and next chapter, from macro and micro perspectives Kurdish ethnic category and Kurdish ethnic group in Turkey refer to different empirical phenomena. This chapter will examine the cultural attributes of the Kurdish ethnic category that have been constructed by the everyday practices of the ordinary Kurds in the historical process and the strategies and tactics that Kurdish political entrepreneurs employed to form a Kurdish ethnic group pursuing certain political and cultural objectives.

This chapter includes two main sections. In the first section, I will briefly discuss the main cultural characteristics of Kurdish ethnic category, cultural elements that are socially, economically and politically important in defining Kurdish cultural landscape in Turkey. In the second section, I will discuss how a Kurdish ethnic group that struggle for certain political and cultural rights has emerged in the historical process. This section will examine various tactics that Kurdish political elites employed to form a Kurdish ethnic group out of Kurdish ethnic

¹³ The following studies are some examples of the studies that examine Kurdish ethnic group including group-making strategies, processes and actors: Natali (2004), Watt (2010), Somer (2008), Criss (1995), Kibris (2010).

category. I will suggest that violence was the most effective strategy for the Kurdish political elites in order to successfully construct a viable Kurdish ethnic group.

Kurdish Ethnic Category in Turkey

Kurds are one of the indigenous peoples of the Middle East. The lands where they live have historically been called Kurdistan, which remained intact for centuries until the Safavid and the Ottoman Empires made an agreement in 1639 to divide the territory into two parts (Bruinessen, 1992; McDowall, 1996; Tan, 2010). Both empires controlled their portion of the land by granting Kurdish Princes (*Emirs*) autonomy regarding their internal organizations. This system enabled Kurdish *emirs* and tribal leaders to preserve the existing cultural structures and power hierarchies (McDowall, 1996). However, with the breakdown of the Ottoman and the Safavids empires and the emergence of new nation states in the Middle East in the 20th century, the Kurdish populated lands were divided further among four countries, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, with the majority of Kurds remaining under the sovereignty of the Turkish Republic. Although no reliable official data are available, it is estimated that between 25 and 35 million Kurds inhabit a mountainous region straddling the borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. It is also estimated that between 15 and 18 million Kurds constitute around one-fifth of the general population of Turkey.

Dutch anthropologist Martin Van Bruinessen (1992) locates the geography of Kurdish populated lands as follows:

Kurdistan ('the land of the Kurds') is a strategically located region of the Middle East, comprising important parts of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria... The heart of Kurdistan consists of forbidding mountains that have always deterred invading armies and provided a refuge to the persecuted and to bandits. The eastern or Kurdish Taurus and the Zagros chain form its backbone, stretching

roughly from the northwest to the southeast. On the southwestern flank a large number of parallel, often very high and steep folds gradually lower towards the Mesopotamian plains. To the north and northeast the landscape changes into a steppe-like plateau and highlands... The lowland plains in the south and the highland plateaus in the east form a natural boundary of Kurdistan... In the northwest there is no such sharp boundary; Kurdish and Turkish groups merge gradually (p.11).

Occupying the borderlands of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, Kurds have been in a constant interaction with these dominant countries, resulting in their assimilation into Turkish, Persian and Arabic cultures to an extent that could threaten their own culture. The absence of an overarching political authority (a Kurdish nation state) that promotes and preserve Kurdish culture and language, along with hegemonic assimilationist policies of the nation-states in which Kurds live, puts Kurdish culture and language in a vulnerable situation. However, the rough geography of the Kurdish populated regions, which has largely obstructed external cultural penetration, the presence of a strong oral tradition (Allison, 2010), and most importantly the cultural activities of Kurdish intellectuals in these countries have helped Kurds preserve and maintain their cultural mores and traditions despite some cultural erosion. This is not to say that Kurds have a homogenous cultural structure that is lucid to Kurds across all four countries. To the contrary, the cultural content of the Kurdish ethnic category includes multiple dialects, faiths, and tribal traditions that make it difficult to speak about a cultural unity among the members of the Kurdish ethnic category.

Since my aim here is not to fully examine the cultural content of the Kurdish ethnic category, I will briefly discuss some essential cultural characteristics that recurrently appear in ethnographic accounts. Extensive ethnographic and historical accounts (Barth, 1953; Bruinessen, 1992; Leach, 1940; McDowall, 1996; Ozoglu, 2004, 2007) indicate that three main cultural

features shape the political, social and cultural landscapes of the Kurdish populated territories: the Kurdish language with its multiple dialects (*Kurmanji, Zazaki, Sorani and Gorani*), religion with its various sects (*Sunni, Shia and Alawite*), and tribal loyalties. These cultural characteristics are important both because they act as ordering principles in regulating social and cultural life in Kurdish populated regions and because they play critical roles in shaping the political behaviors of the Kurds and in ethnic group formation within as well as interactions with the outside. Below I briefly discuss these key cultural elements.

Together with Persian, Pashto, and Balochi, Kurdish belongs to the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family. There are four major dialects of Kurdish that are barely if at all mutually understandable: Kurmanji (spoken in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria), Sorani (spoken in Iraq and Iran), Gorani (spoken in Iran and Iraq), and Zazaki (spoken in Turkey) (Bruinessen, 1992; Hassanpour, 2012; Tan, 2010). Moreover, each of these dialects also includes variations that are only partially mutually understandable (Hassanpour, 1992; Opengin, 2012). In this sense, there is no language unity among the Kurds. The most common dialect is Kurmanji, which is spoken by approximately 90% of Turkish Kurds, all Syrian Kurds, and significant portions of Iraqi and Iranian Kurds. Sorani, which is common among some Iraqi and Iranian Kurds, is the second most widely spoken dialect. A small segment of Kurdish population, however, speaks Zazaki, a dialect that cannot be comprehended by Kurmanji-speaking Kurds. Since Kurmanji is considered the *lingua franca* among Turkish Kurds, it may be considered to provide linguistic unity among them, but it must be noted that there are five different varieties of Kurmanji that are common in different Kurdish-majority provinces of Turkey: 1) *Serhadi* in Mus, Bitlis and Agri; 2) *Mahmudi* in Hakkari and south of Van; 3) *Bohti* in Cizre, Sirnak etc.; 4) *Urfi* in Urfa,

Adiyaman, and Malatya; and 5) *Tori* in Gercus, Kerboran, Midyat and Nusaybin (Tan, 2010, p. 35).

The second significant cultural element of Kurdish ethnic category is religion, which comprises Sunni Islam, Shi'a Islam, Alawism and some smaller heterodox groups like Yezidis and Ahl-e Haqq. The sweeping majority of Kurds belong to Sunni Islam with a small segment (in Iran and Iraq) affiliated with the Shi'a sect and Alawism (only in Turkey) (Bruinessen, 1992; Houston, 2008; King, 2017; Leezenberg, 2017). Islam as a religion has substantially shaped Kurdish cultural, political and economic life for centuries (Acker, 2004). The seventeenth century Muslim travel writer Evliya Celebi stressed in his book that "Kurds were famous for their religious learning in Arabic and Persian" (Leezenberg, 2017, p. 35). As Bruinessen (1998b) observes, "Islam has . . . deeply affected Kurdish society; even ostensibly non-religious aspects of social and political life are moulded by it. As in other tribal societies, networks of *madrasas* and Sufi orders have functioned as mechanisms of social integration, overcoming segmentary division" (p.7). To put it simply, the majority of Kurds see Islam as an integral and indispensable part of their ethnic identity (Acker, 2004; Atacan, 2001; Van Bruinessen, 1992; Koter, 2013; Leezenberg, 2017; Özoglu, 2007).

Here two points are worth further discussion. Sufi orders, especially *Qadiriyya* and *Naqshbandiyya*, have deeply shaped Kurdish culture for centuries (Bruinessen, 1992, 1998b; Hourani, 1972; Leezenberg, 2017). Mawlana Khalid Baghdadi (1776-1827), one of the major figures in the *Naqshbandiyya* order, was of Kurdish origin, and his *Khalifas* spread into regions extending from Iraq, Syria, and Turkey to India (Bruinessen, 1992, 1998b; Hourani, 1972; Yuksel, 1993). As Leezenberg (2017) notes, "Mawlana Khalid has been crucial in identifying Sufism in general and the Khalidi branch of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiya brotherhood in

particular, as the leading element of Islamic revivalism in the Ottoman polity of the time” (p.35). Sufi sheikhs (religious leaders) of these religious brotherhoods have exercised unchallenged authority among their disciples and shaped the social and political behavior of Kurdish masses for centuries. It is because of this authority that some sheikhs could initiate and lead a number of rebellions in the past such as Sheikh Said’s rebellion against the Kemalist regime’s secular projects in Turkey, Sheikh Mahmud Berzenci’s uprising against British colonial rule in Iraq, Sheikh Ahmad Barzani’s revolt against British rule and Iraqi regimes, and so on (Ahmed & Gunter, 2007; McDowall, 1996; Tan, 2010; Yayman, 2011).

The influence religion and thus Sufi sheiks have exerted on Kurds have always been very strong such that even some non-religious Kurds may emotionally be attached to Sufi Sheiks. The following observation of an anthropologist in the field clearly displays this strong impact:

At a political meeting of immigrant workers from Turkey I once talked with a small group of people who were active in a socialist workers' union. They were quite class-conscious men. When I heard that they were from eastern Turkey I switched from Turkish to Kurdish. Immediately the discussion became more cordial; we were temporarily an in-group from which our Turkish friends were excluded. After some time, I told them that I was the friend of an influential sheikh from their district, expecting that this would provoke them. To my astonishment, however, my standing with them rose even more: although they were not very religious, they associated themselves emotionally with this sheikh (Van Bruinessen, 1992, p. 7).

As for Madrasas, the aforementioned Sufi orders usually have concentrated around madrasas, which are institutions of religious education.¹⁴ Three kinds of madrasas have emerged in the Kurdish populated regions in the historical process (Bruinessen 1998). The first type was the madrasas that were established by the governing dynasties such as the Ottoman sultans. These

¹⁴ On the formation and functions of madrasas in wider Islamic context see Makdisi (1981).

madrasas were designed to educate their students for official state positions. Their curriculum was decided by the state. The rulers of Kurdish Emirates that had political autonomy under the Ottoman rule established the second type of madrasas, which were outside the state education system. These madrasas differed from the state madrasas in two ways. First, while the curriculum of the state madrasas was based on Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, the second type madrasas were teaching the jurisprudence of Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam because of the fact that the majority of the Kurds were affiliated with this school of Islamic law. The second difference is the importance they gave to Kurdish language; the second type madrasas left more space for Kurdish. The third type madrasas were those that have functioned in the village mosques. These madrasas were designed to teach the principles of Islam and educate future imams serving in the villages. It must be noted that while the first two types of madrasas disappeared due to the secular Kemalist reforms in Turkey, the third type of madrasas have survived in those villages that have been isolated from the state control.

The third distinctive cultural feature of Kurdish ethnic category is tribal social organization (*Asiret*). Kurdish society has been a tribal society for centuries, a cultural trait that affects its social, political and economic structures (Bruinessen, 1992; McDowall, 1996). Kurdish tribes are hierarchical and foster a strong sense of cohesion among their members by virtue of kinship. "The Kurdish tribe is a socio-political and generally also territorial unit based on descent and kinship, real or putative, with a characteristic internal structure" (Bruinessen, 1992, p. 51). The tribal system regulates social, economic and political relationships within and among the tribes. The sub-divisions of Kurdish tribal structures are family (*aile*), clan (*mal*, *sülale*) and larger clan (*ocak* or *kabile*) (Yalçın-Heckman, 2002). With urbanization, however, tribes and their supporting structures have gradually disintegrated and lost their power, especially

among the Kurds of Turkey. However, tribal ties still persist in Turkey, and the tribal chiefs exercise a secular authority (*Ağa*), in that, in contrast with the religious authority of sheikhs, its source of legitimacy is not religion but material power and blood ties.¹⁵

The formation of Kurdish Ethnic Group in Turkey

As indicated in the previous section, the Kurdish ethnic category, which is constructed over time by the everyday practices of ordinary Kurds, is characterized by multiple dialects, sects and tribes, which make it, like all other ethnic categories, an analytically ambiguous and amorphous entity (Kirisci & Winrow, 1997; White, 2000). It may be hard to conceive that the members of this ethnic category, with all their differences, and who moreover, are, dispersed in four neighboring countries, can constitute a cohesive ethnic group. Nevertheless, in each of these countries, Kurdish ethnic entrepreneurs, in response to the assimilationist policies of these states, have emerged to form Kurdish ethnic groups for achieving certain political goals, ranging from cultural and political rights to independence. In this study, I focus only on such activities among the Kurds of Turkey since its inception in 1923.

Kurdish political entrepreneurs in Turkey have adopted various ethnic group-making strategies in order to mobilize members of the Kurdish ethnic category to pursue certain political objectives. In the course of almost a century since the foundation of modern Turkey in 1923, the group-making tactics of Kurdish political entrepreneurs have varied in response to structural and practical conditions. I suggest that in the historical process Kurdish political elites employed three different ethnic group-making strategies to achieve their political goals ranging from securing tribal and religious interests to an independent state. I will also indicate that there has

¹⁵ On Kurdish tribal system see Van Bruinessen (1992, Ch. 2), Yalçın-Heckman (2002), Houston (2008), Barth (1953).

been a parallel between political and cultural objectives set, and strategies adopted. In the following, I discuss, in chronological order, these three group-making strategies that ethnic political elites have drawn on since 1920s.

Tribal and Religious Revolts Against the New Republic

The first ethnic-group making strategy of Kurdish political entrepreneurs was to mobilize Kurds along tribal and religious lines so they would rise up against the political authority of the newly established Turkish Republic. Before examining the peculiarities and aims of these revolts, it is useful to briefly review the Kurdish issue in relation to the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. This narrative begins with the activities of early Kurdish ethnic entrepreneurs in response to the harsh centralization policies of the Ottoman administration in the 19th century, which imposed these policies in the face of existential challenges posed by colonial powers of Europe. These rebellions did not go beyond local tribal uprisings and ended with failure. However, in the process they set the precedent for subsequent successful group-making strategies (Bozarslan, 2000, p. 19).

The existential challenges posed by militarily, economically, and politically preponderant colonial powers forced the Ottoman rulers to develop strategies for coping with this threat, one of which was to radically transform the existing decentralized political system (especially in the empire's peripheral regions) into a more centralized one. This meant a significant change in the relationship between the Ottoman administration in Istanbul and the Kurdish emirates, a peaceful relationship since the 16th century, when the Kurdish paramount chieftains (*emir*) gave allegiance to the Ottoman rule by supporting the Ottoman Sultan, Selim I, in his successful military campaign against the Iranian Safavid Empire (Bruinessen, 1992, p. 143; Tan, 2010, p. 78). As a reward for their vital contribution to the Ottoman military victory, in 1515 Selim I signed an

autonomy agreement with the Kurdish *emirs* that granted Kurdish emirates autonomy in their internal affairs but obliged them to pay tribute to the Ottoman rule. This autonomy agreement laid a foundation for a relatively stable and harmonious relationship between the Ottoman rule in Istanbul and the Kurdish emirates that lasted until the early 19th century.¹⁶

However, the autonomy of the Kurdish emirates became threatened after the policies of centralization were implemented. An outcome of centralization was that the Ottoman rulers appointed governors and bureaucrats from Istanbul to directly govern its Kurdish subjects and collect taxes, administrative tasks that had been implemented by the Kurdish *emirs* for centuries. Such centralization moves caused unrest among the Kurdish *emirs*, which ultimately resulted in a number of rebellions creating instabilities in the Kurdish provinces of the empire, which¹⁷ did not challenge Ottoman control but rather led to the breaking-up of the emirates into small-scale tribes so that, Bruinessen (1992) notes, “by the middle of the century there were no emirates left in Kurdistan” (p. 176). The Kurdish rebellions that took place in this period did not go beyond tribal reactions to the policies of centralization of the empire that threatened the tribal chiefs’ interests. Because the idea of nationalism was unknown to or had no impact on the majority of the Kurds, these revolts were not nationalistic in character (Bozarslan, 2000, p. 17; McDowall, 1992, p. 14).¹⁸

The disintegration of the centuries-old order led to an unstable and mainly tense relationship between the Kurdish tribes and the Ottoman rule. Thus, in the 19th century, many

¹⁶ On the internal organization and external status of these Kurdish emirates see Bruinessen (1992, pp. 145-151 and 161-175).

¹⁷ On account of these rebellions see Tan (2010, pp. 88-94).

¹⁸ According to Serif Mardin the Kurdish rebellions that took place in the nineteenth century and the resultant Ottomans’ reactions produced a kind of social contract between the Kurds and the central authority in that these rebellions were resolved after parties giving some concessions to each other.

Kurdish tribes rose up against the Ottoman authority for different reasons. According to McDowall (1992), “Some tried to achieve complete independence, others merely to hang on to what they had previously enjoyed as of right, while one or two tried unsuccessfully to play off the regional powers, neither of which was likely in the long run to welcome Kurdish independence” (p. 14). Besides harsh military measures, the Ottomans employed different ideological discursive tactics to keep their subjects together. The first ideological discourse was that of Ottomanism (*Osmanlıcilik*), which aimed to create a supranational Ottoman identity that would impede separatist nationalist sentiments from taking root among non-Muslim subjects of the empire, such as Greeks, Serbians, and Bulgarians. It soon became obvious that Ottomanism as an ideological discourse did not achieve the anticipated goal. After this failure, Islamism replaced Ottomanism as a new ideological discourse that aimed to establish and strengthen unity among the Muslim subjects. Under the reign of Sultan Abdulhamit II, the use of Islamism in response to the subversive European colonial activities in the Ottoman territories became widespread and functioned effectively for a while, at least as far as the Kurds were concerned. The Kurds of the empire embraced Islamism, especially after the Sultan Abdulhamit II founded *Hamidiye* cavalry regiments that included only Kurdish soldiers and officers in order to secure the empire’s eastern territories against Russians and Armenians, a military organization that was a source of esteem and dignity for the Kurds (Klein, 2002, 2011). However, this ideological tactic also failed to achieve coherence among the Muslim subjects, as Arabs and Albanians started to struggle for their own independent states. Thus, those Turkish intellectuals and political elites of the Empire who constituted the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, CUP) found fertile ground to promote Turkish nationalism and pursue Turkish nationalist ideals (Ahmad, 2014). After the 1908 Young Turk Revolution they deposed

Abdulhamit II and immediately disbanded the *Hamidiye* regiments for their loyalty to the Sultan (Klein, 2002). This last ideology set a precedent for the ensuing Turkish Republic, which was established in 1923. The first two ideological discourses (Ottomanism and Islamism) had provided a living space for the Kurds, but the ideology of Turkish nationalism left no room for them, as an outcome of which the political elites of the Turkish republic implemented assimilationist policies when dealing with the Kurdish issue.¹⁹

The establishment of the Turkish Republic did not affect the nature of the Kurdish problem, but it significantly altered the way the state authorities approached the issue. Although Kurdish unrest continued to be manifested in separate rebellions against the newly established state in Ankara initiated and led by tribal and/or religious leaders (with tribal and/or religious motives) (Bozarslan, 2000, p. 17), the ardently nationalistic response of the new republican political and military elites took the form of drastic changes compared to the Ottomans' moderate reaction to the issue.

This period was characterized by the Kemalist elites' efforts to lay the foundation for a secular Turkish nation-state based on Turkish nationalism. There were two mechanisms at work: "Turkification" and "modernization." Through the former mechanism, the Kemalist elites aimed to forge a homogenized Turkish nation. They suppressed the cultural manifestations of all other ethnic categories and strictly imposed Turkish ethnic identity "as a hegemonic identity in every sphere of social life" (Aktar, 2009, p. 29). The constitution of the newly established republic, which was promulgated in 1924, defined all citizens as Turks, denying the existence of other

¹⁹ For an extensive discussion of this era and aforementioned ideologies of Ottoman history see Hanioglu (2008), Shaw and Shaw (1977), Kayali (1997).

ethnic identities within the borders of the Turkish Republic.²⁰ The second mechanism, modernization, was used to reform the Turkish society as a whole according to Western principles, eradicate the public visibility of Islam, and secure the separation of state and religious affairs, which involved the abolition of the caliphate (the highest religious-political position in the Muslim World), the closure of *madrasas* (religious schools), and the replacement of the Arabic alphabet with the Latin Alphabet and the traditional/Islamic dress code with a Western dress code.²¹ These extreme modernization projects of the new Turkish republic alienated large sectors of Turkish society (Kuru, 2009).

These two mechanisms together with secularization campaigns affected the lives of the Kurds more deeply than those of any other groups within the borders of the Turkish Republic. The “Turkification” policies pursued by the regime led to the suppression of the public visibility of Kurdish identity, for example, banning the public use of Kurdish and replacing the Kurdish names of villages with Turkish ones. Another tactic was resettlement of the Kurds into overwhelmingly Turkish-populated Western regions. Modernization, on the other hand, targeted religious institutions and Sufi orders in order to limit their influence on the social and political organization of the state in general and of the Kurds in particular.

These suppressive measures resulted in a number of Kurdish revolts between 1925 and 1938 (including the Sheikh Said, Koçgiri, Ararat, and Dersim). Those who initiated and led these revolts were tribal and religious leaders whose main motivations reflected local issues, such as religious concerns, complaints about high taxes, resistance to conscriptions, and maintenance of tribal influence (Yayman, 2011, p. 51). The state brutally suppressed these revolts, executed

²⁰ According to Yeğen (2009), the denial of the existence of Kurdish identity by the founding fathers of the Republic of Turkey was due in part to their Turkish nationalist ideals, but mainly to their fear that further disintegration of the country would be triggered if the existence of other ethnic categories was recognized.

²¹ On an extensive discussion of Kemalist Modernization projects and their outcomes see Landau (1984).

those who initiated and led them, and displaced masses (Bruinessen, 1992; Icduygu, Romano, & Sirkeci, 1999, p. 993; McDowall, 1992, p. 18, 1996). The new Republican regime did not recognize the issue as ethnic but instead portrayed it as a problem of “the endurance and the resistance of the past [nostalgia for the Ottoman order] (Yeğen, 2011, p. 69). The republican government prepared ten official reports on the issue between 1923 and 1938 based on the observations of state officers in the Kurdish populated regions. The measures these reports suggested for the resolution of the issue included strict military control, forced resettlements, assimilation, and Turkification (Yayman, 2011, p. 65; Yeğen, 2011, p. 70).²² After brutal suppression of the Dersim rebellion in 1938, which was the last Kurdish rebellion of this period, the Kurdish issue entered a silent phase until the 1960 military coup. The radical transformation of the Turkish political landscape triggered by the coup and the new constitution promulgated by the military regime in 1961 opened a new era for the Kurdish issue.

Literary and Political Activism 1960-1980

The second group-making strategy employed by the Kurdish political elites between 1960 and 1980 was literary and political activism. The military coup and subsequent constitution moderately expanded the margins of political and cultural freedoms in Turkey. This period was vibrant not only for Kurdish intellectual activists but for all ideological segments of the Turkish society. To be sure, Kurdish political and intellectual activism started before 1960, but the military coup and subsequent developments paved the way for a fertile and suitable setting. Most authors consider this period to be when the foundations of the politicization of Kurdish identity and nationalism were laid. As Watts (2007) puts it: “Kurdish intellectuals began publishing Kurdish-language periodicals; politicians, activists, editors, and journalists began publicly

²² On the content of these reports see Yayman (2011, p. 63-161).

debating the status of the country's Kurdish communities; and Kurdish activists founded new organizations intended to articulate Kurdish ethnonational interests" (p. 53). The Kurdish political movements emerging in this period had socio-cultural and socio-political qualities that were significantly different from those of the earlier Kurdish rebellions that were led by tribal chiefs or Sufi sheiks (Alış, 2012; Bozarslan, 2000; Bruinessen, 1992; Gündoğan, 2012; Güneş, 2012; Romano, 2006a; Tan, 2010). The preeminent figures of such Kurdish enterprises—i.e., cultural organizations, student unions, and both legal and illegal political parties were well-educated and primarily leftist intellectuals as opposed to the tribal and religious leaders of the previous Kurdish revolts.

This structural transformation of Kurdish movements can be explained in large part by the rise of mass literacy and increasing urbanization level in this period, which significantly increased the number of the Kurds who were graduating from universities. These Kurdish university students, most of whom came from the poor and rural regions of eastern Turkey, became involved in close interactions with Turks as they became acquainted with leftist, Marxist and nationalist ideologies. Kurdish elites of this period set out to initiate an ethnic "reawakening" or "rebirth" of Kurdish nationalism through literary and political activism, which included publishing newspapers and periodicals in Kurdish, and establishing cultural centers and political parties (White, 2000, p. 130). Some of the key Kurdish political entrepreneurs in this period were Musa Anter (a prominent intellectual and journalist), Naci Kutlay (medical doctor), Sait Elçi and Kemal Burkay (lawyer) (Güneş, 2012). It must be noted that these activists were not ethnic separatists seeking an independent Kurdish state but ethnic entrepreneurs striving for cultural and political rights within the country. They were beneficiaries of the Turkish modernization via

expansion of education. Now they were demanding equal treatment from the state as citizen of Kurdish community.

Kurdish activists of the time rarely used the words *Kurds* and *Kurdistan* in their writings or speeches but stressed Turkish citizenship rights of the people of the East. This policy was consistent with the government's denial of the existence of Kurdish ethnic identity, which included banning the public use of these terms, and its position since the inception of the Turkish Republic in 1923 that the Kurdish issue was only regional and economic. To get around this problem, Kurdish political elites tapped into the labels the state used to define the issue. According to the official state discourse, the source of the problem was not ethnicity but the economic backwardness of the Kurdish-populated eastern provinces. It was not the Kurdish Problem but "the Eastern Problem" (Watts, 2007, p. 66). To avoid legal sanctions, Kurdish activists chose to promote the rights of the Kurds in the language of the state's discourse. For instance, instead of writing about the cultural, economic and political problems of the Kurds, they wrote about such problems of the eastern parts of the country (Alış, 2012, p. 83).²³ More to the point, instead of using ethnic labels, they used ethnicity-neutral terms such as equality, economic welfare, socialism, and justice in order to articulate the rights of the Kurds (Bozarslan, 2000, p. 18).

Among the Kurdish periodicals published in the 1960s were *Dicle-Fırat*, *Deng* (Voice), *Roja Nêwe* (New Life), *Yeni Akış* (New Stream). In their writings, Kurdish activists and intellectuals aimed to raise the Kurds' ethnic consciousness. It was *Deng* that openly mentioned the Kurds and their distinctive cultural and linguistic peculiarities. For instance, the first published issue of *Deng* editorialized that, "Today, it is a fact that among our citizens are those

²³ On the evolution of the state's discourse on the Kurdish issue over the years see Yeğen (1996, 2011).

who speak Kurdish as their mother tongue, not only (those) in the East and Southeast but those who have settled in Istanbul and Izmir. *Deng* will reserve a portion of its publications for Kurdish” (quoted in Watts, 2007, pp. 67–68). As this statement illustrates, The First issue of the *Deng* deviated from the state’s discourse and declared the existence of an identity category of people having different culture and language than the culture and language of the Turkish ethnic category. Another periodical that addressed the issue by explicitly mentioning the Kurdish cultural rights was *Yeni Akis* that was published in 1966 but was shut down after the fourth issue (Burkay, 2010). To be sure these periodicals were not the only products of this period. Kurdish classics written in the 15th and 16th centuries such as Ahmede Xani’s *Mem-u Zin* and Şerefhan Bitlisi’s *Şerefname* were republished. Kurdish ethnic elites also republished and extensively sold the books that were written on the Kurdish history and culture by the earlier Kurdish intellectuals (Bozarslan, 2005b). Their main motivation was to create a Kurdish nationalist consciousness through these literary activities.

Along with these short-lived Kurdish publications and republications of Kurdish classics, Kurdish elites of the time employed other tactics to achieve their objective of forming an ethnic group out of the Kurdish ethnic category. Those on the left joined the Worker’s Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TIP), which sought to disseminate socialist ideals throughout the country. Initially they considered a specific emphasis on Kurdish rights needless because they believed that through socialism Kurds would gain their cultural and political rights. However, some Kurdish members later left the party due to an emerging controversy over the TIP’s position on the Kurdish problem, which the Kurdish members found insufficient and disappointing (Tan, 2010, p. 351). In 1965 Kurdish political elites on the right, established a new political party, The Democratic Party of Turkish Kurdistan, which confronted the official governmental position and

directly pursued a Kurdish ethno-nationalist agenda. “This party,” Bozarslan (2005) observes, “essentially brought together some urban notables, craftsmen and Kurdish *ulema*”. However, the movement deflated when the leader of the party was killed in 1968.

Here, two significant activities of the Kurdish political elites during this period should be noted. First, in order to convey their nationalist ideas to the Kurdish masses, in 1967 they held several meetings, dubbed the Eastern Meetings, in the Kurdish populated provinces of Turkey, the main themes of which were the economic, political and cultural problems of the east. Although the language used in these meetings accommodated the sensitivities of the state by not making direct references to Kurdish nationalism, they aroused nationalist feelings in the Kurdish-populated region. The second activity was the formation of cultural organizations such as the Revolutionary Cultural Society of the East (*Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları*, DDKO) established in Kurdish provinces. These cultural organizations were very active in order to create ethnic awareness among the Kurds (Kirisci & Winrow, 1997, p. 109; Tan, 2010, p. 353).²⁴

However, the state’s reaction to the nationalist Kurdish movements and activities was extremely harsh, particularly after the military coup in 1971. The military regime shut down all these political parties and cultural centers, raided Kurdish villages for the propaganda activities of the DDKO, and arrested the majority of their leaders. The repressive measures targeting the Kurdish political and cultural revival in the early 1970s led to two significant outcomes. First, it did not put an end to or weaken these nationalist sentiments and activities, but rather strengthened them (Van Bruinessen, 1998a, p. 39). Second, and more importantly, it radicalized the ethnic group formation strategies pursued by the Kurdish entrepreneurs in that soft-liner

²⁴ According to Guneş (2012), during these meetings Kurdish political entrepreneurs successfully gathered large crowds to communicate their ideas. Still, it is a fact that they could not form a viable and sustained Kurdish ethnic group. The support they mustered was short-lived.

political elites who sought to construct a cohesive Kurdish ethnic group by using peaceful political means lost ground to hardliners who advocated resorting to violence and armed struggle for reaching their political objectives. According to Bozarslan (2005), until 1970, the Kurdish movements and political activities were civic and integrationist, seeking only to obtain equal citizenship rights, not separation. However, in response to the state's repressive measures, emerging radical Kurdish groups raised ethnic nationalist and separatist demands. Amid such a milieu, in 1977 a violent Kurdish movement was established, the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party), which has shaped and controlled the Kurdish nationalist movement and its aspirations since then.²⁵ This brings us into the third ethnic group formation tactic that Kurdish political entrepreneurs have strategically employed so far.

Mixed strategies: Guerilla Warfare, Terrorist Attacks and Formal Politics

The first two group-making tactics of the Kurdish political entrepreneurs (tribal and religious revolts in the 1920s and 1930s, and literary and political activism in 1960s and 1970s) failed to form a sustainable Kurdish ethnic group out of the Kurdish ethnic category in Turkey due to the state's repressive measures. The tribal and religious revolts that erupted in the early years of the republic were violent but not separatist. They did challenge the legitimacy of the newly established Turkish state but, as Bozarslan (2000) puts it, "not because it was Turkish but because it was state" (p. 17). The motives behind these revolts were religious and tribal concerns such as securing tribal interests or preserving traditional religious structure in the Kurdish populated regions that the new state explicitly targeted.

²⁵ To be sure, in the second half of the 1970s some other Kurdish political organizations such as the Revolutionary Democratic Cultural Associations (DDKD), *Özgürlük Yolu* (Road Of Freedom), *Rizgari* (Liberation), and Kawa were established, they did not survive. (Bishku, Michael, 2007, pp. 85–86; Tan, 2010, pp. 355–357).

On the other hand, though also not separatist, the Kurdish political entrepreneurs who emerged in 1960s and 1970s aimed to mobilize Kurds for certain political ends such as more government representation, equal rights and solutions for the economic underdevelopment of the Kurdish populated regions. Their main objective was to raise a nationalist consciousness among the Kurds, but the structural factors restricted their movement and capacity to reach out wider Kurdish masses. As I will discuss in the fifth chapter, they started to promote ideas that were very much antagonistic to the tribal and religious institutions of the Kurdish ethnic category. They regarded these institutions as the chief barriers that prevented Kurdish nationalism to take root among the Kurds. This critical and antagonistic stance significantly curtailed their capacity to mobilize Kurdish masses whose mindsets were heavily shaped by these social institutions. They employed non-violent means such as publishing books, periodicals and reports, and establishing cultural and political organizations to reach their goals. However, all these strategies failed to achieve the instigators' objectives.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistanê, PKK) has been the only Kurdish organization in the history of the Republic of Turkey that has demanded the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. Neither the tribal and religious revolts in 1920s and 1930s nor literary and political activities of the 1960s and 1970s had aimed to establish an independent state for the Kurds. It was the PKK that made this radical demand that is explicitly expressed in its 1978 manifesto:

Given today's conditions, an independent state is the only true and correct way and therefore the only revolutionary thesis; other theses and roadmaps are reformist because they do not touch state-borders, and because they are reformists and reactionary. Aiming to create a politically, economically, and in other ways independent country, the Kurdistan Liberation Movement, first

in relation with the neighboring peoples, then peoples in the region and the world, will work in the interest of a world proletarian revolution (quoted in Jongerden, 2017, p. 251).

This profound turn in political objective led to another radical turn in the means employed to attain the objective. Unlike the peaceful Kurdish political organizations in the 1960s and 1970s, The PKK has strategically resorted to violence including guerilla warfare and terrorist attacks in order to form a Kurdish ethnic group mobilized for an independent Kurdish state. Unlike previous Kurdish political entrepreneurs, the leaders of the organization have been successful in constructing a viable Kurdish ethnic group out of Kurdish ethnic category in Turkey, though they failed to reach their original objective of establishing an independent Kurdish state. As I will discuss later in this section, the political objective of the organization has undergone significant changes from establishing an independent Kurdish state to “democratic autonomy” for the Kurds.

The PKK was established by Marxist-Leninist university students under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan, an undergraduate at Ankara University.²⁶ Its leadership cadres comprised university students who had sympathies with the revolutionary Marxist youth groups of the 1960s and 1970s who actively sought a socialist revolution in Turkey (Alış, 2012; Güneş, 2012; Özcan, 2006; Tan, 2010). These radical groups promoted the idea that armed struggle was essential for meaningful revolutionary change (Barkey & Fuller, 1998; Criss, 1995; Güneş, 2012; White, 2000). In their version of the instrumental use of violence, the PKK has aimed to liberate Kurds and Kurdistan “through a process of creative destruction: the simultaneous destruction of colonialism and the creation of an independent state” (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2011, p. 124). The

²⁶ Kemal Burkay (2010) who was (and still is) a key figure in Kurdish literary and political activities in 1960s and 1970s argues that the Turkish intelligence agency (*Milli istihbarat Teşkilatı*, MIT) helped Öcalan to establish the PKK in order to root out some other Kurdish political organizations and prominent figures. According to Burkay, Abdullah Öcalan himself admitted this connection by stressing that MIT provided the PKK with arms and financial support in the first three years of the organization.

PKK's objectives specified in his initial programs set a ground for the strategic use of violence.

As Barkey and Fuller (1998) indicates:

The PKK's program mirrored the slogans of the extreme left: Kurdistan with all four of its segments, controlled by Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, represented the weakest link in 'capitalism's chain' and the fight against imperialism was a fight to save Kurdistan's natural resources (p. 23).

In the PKK's mindset, "the destruction of colonialism" referred not only to the presence of the Turkish state in the Kurdish-populated lands but also to tribal landlords and the religious structure, which were seen as the major obstacles to the development of a Kurdish nationalist consciousness in the real sense of the word. Thus, its first violent activity was an "assault on someone considered to be a 'comprador landlord'" (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2011, p. 125). In other words, the initial violent activities of the PKK targeted Kurdish tribal elites who were seen as the collaborators of the state in the "colonization" of the Kurdish lands. They targeted some rival leftist Kurdish groups as well.

Besides violent tactics, the organization's leading figures held secret meetings in many Kurdish villages and towns to disseminate their ideology, recruit new members, and set the stage for an armed struggle. The first violent activity of the PKK against the state took place in 1984, when it attacked a military patrol and killed two soldiers. This attack marked the onset of a prolonged and highly violent war between the PKK and the Turkish security forces, in which since 1984 more than 40 thousand people have been killed, thousands of others injured, and thousands more displaced.

Several reasons are being articulated in the literature for explaining why and how the PKK has succeeded to establish a considerable base of support among the Kurds in Turkey. First is the effective use of existing networks that previous Kurdish elites had constructed. Indeed, The PKK did not appear from scratch. The Kurdish political and literary activism and their

experiences with the state (especially after the 1971 military coup) prior to the emergence of the PKK had set a fertile ground for the organization to flourish. Second, the organization's initial party programs specifically referred to the tribal relations in the Kurdish populated regions as being examples of "relations of domination," something that needed to be rooted out. In other words, they exploited the relationship between tribal lords and peasants by supporting the latter (Romano, 2006a). Third, they took advantage of Turkey's rivalries with some neighboring countries to get financial and logistical supports. This was the case especially for Syria that allowed the PKK to open training camps inside its borders.

To be sure, all of these factors more or less contributed to the success of the organization in terms of sustaining its existence and activities but they have little explanatory power for the success of the organization in establishing a viable Kurdish ethnic group with a stable support base. For many the most decisive factor that enabled the PKK to ascertain a considerable support base among the Kurds was its strategic use of violence that provoked the state for the harsh retaliations often with indiscriminate and excessive use of violence (Taşpınar, 2005).²⁷ Accounts of many former and existing members of the PKK corroborate this view (Matur, 2011). In addition to this, the bad treatment of Kurdish political activists by the military regime following the 1980 coup is also regarded as a reason that helped the PKK recruit new members and convince them of the necessity of an armed struggle for securing Kurdish political and cultural rights.

In response to recurring and growing violent activities of the organization, instead of using full-fledged military measures, the state established village guard system in 1985 by

²⁷ Ethnic organizations sometimes strategically escalate violence to provoke retaliation from the incumbents in order to muster support from the members of targeted ethnic categories. (Brubaker, 2002; Fearon & Laitin, 2010; Wilkinson, 2006). PKK has successfully employed this strategy since 1980s.

recruiting Kurdish fighters among the Kurds who had distaste for the organization and/or were loyal to the state.²⁸ Village guard system is still in effect in Turkey, a system that has led to many controversies in the country since its inception. When realized that the military threat the organization posed was much more serious than expected, Turgut Özal government declared a state of emergency in 11 predominantly Kurdish-populated provinces in 1987 and 2 more provinces were added to the list later in 1990. The state of emergency rule paved the way for extensive human rights abuses and mistreatments of larger Kurdish masses by the state officials, something that further expanded the size of the Kurdish ethnic group led by the PKK. To put it simply, this vicious cycle of violence and especially the use of indiscriminate violence by the state worked in favor of the PKK, that is, the organization gradually expanded and solidified its support base among some of the Kurds.

Violent clashes between the PKK and Turkish armed forces intensified in early 1990s as the organization secured a solid support base and gained a logistical capability to launch sustained attacks. One important development that further advanced the logistical capabilities of the organization was the Gulf-War in 1991. As an outcome of the war, an autonomous Kurdish region emerged in the Northern Iraq that provided the PKK with a safe haven outside the Turkish borders. To have a stronghold that was relatively safe from Turkish military incursions enabled the organization to plan and execute its attacks with further success (Sayarı, 1997). The PKK's attacks consisted "mainly of hit-and-run actions against military personnel and against Kurdish civilians considered 'traitors' and 'collaborator'" (Bruinessen, 1988). The escalation of violent

²⁸ Initial candidates for the village guards were the members of the certain Kurdish tribes that the PKK explicitly targeted but the later composition of the recruitment pool displayed significant variance in terms of demographic background especially after 1990s (Van Bruinessen, 1992).

clashes heavily increased the economic, political and human costs of the conflict that left significant imprint on the political, cultural and economic landscapes of the country.

However, things changed in the late 1990s when Turkey pursued a very aggressive foreign policy by threatening Syria to expel Abdullah Öcalan, the ideological and political leader of the PKK. Turkish Military commanders and top political figures explicitly targeted Syrian regime that had given Öcalan sanctuary in Syrian soils. Turkish pressure diplomatically backed by the USA materialized the expulsion of Öcalan. “He had been on the run from Syria to Italy to Russia to Greece. He finally landed in Nairobi,” where he was arrested by Turkish special forces with the support of CIA in 1999 (Weiner, 1999). This was a real trauma for the organization and its supporters, a trauma that put the organization in a chaos so that its militants withdrew across the Iraqi borders and ceased their attacks.

The capture and later imprisonment of Öcalan “led to a number of dramatic changes in PKK ideology and action. On the military front, guerrilla warfare was brought to an effective halt [until the resurgence of violence in 2015]. The most important ideological post-1999 change was the PKK’s move away from national independence to a form of autonomy within Turkey” (Leezenberg, 2016, p. 673). I will discuss this significant turn in the PKK’s political objective later in this section.

Now, I turn to discuss another group-making strategy that Kurdish political elites have effectively employed since 1990s in parallel with guerilla warfare and terrorist attacks, which is electoral politics. The growing popularity of the PKK led to a new strategy on the part of the organization. In the early 1990s, Kurdish political figures pushed legal grounds to further expand their support base including establishing pro-Kurdish political parties to be represented in elections. Finding legal channels through which to convey their political projects and objectives

to the Kurdish masses was a significant strategic move on the part of Kurdish political entrepreneurs. The first pro-Kurdish political party was the People's Labor Party (HEP), which was founded in 1990 by 22 Kurdish parliamentarians who split from the center-left Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP) (Bishku, Michael, 2007, p. 91). However, state tolerance of HEP was short lived because, as Watts (2010, p. 51) stated, it "was closed three years later by the Turkish Constitutional Court for 'threatening the indivisible unity of the country' and supporting terrorism," and the leaders and some members of the party were arrested.

Nevertheless, Kurdish political activism on electoral grounds continued as did efforts to suppress it. HEP was followed by the Democracy Party (DEP), which was established in 1993 but closed by the constitutional court in 1994. The People's Democracy Party (HADEP) replaced DEP in 1994 and survived until it was eventually closed by the constitutional court in 2003 (Bishku, Michael, 2007, p. 91; Watts, 2010, pp. 69–70). The parties before HADEP (HEP and DEP) never run in the elections. HADEP was the first Kurdish political party that was allowed to run in the Turkish elections. HADEP was followed by the Democratic People Party (DEHAP), which according to Watts (2010, p. 75) "merged with the newly formed Democratic Society Party (DTP) in August 2005, founded by ex-DEP parliamentarians after they were released from jail". The Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) succeeded the DTP after it was closed in 2009 and finally BDP merged with the People's Democratic Party (HDP) in 2014. Currently HDP represents the national Kurdish movement in legal and political domains. Although these political parties have no direct institutional ties with the PKK, it is obvious that they have acted as its political wing.

That being said, I will now briefly discuss the trajectories of each of these political parties and the demands that they raised. Since I provide a detailed analysis of the electoral

performances of these parties in the next section, I will not get into specifics in this respect. HEP was the first pro-Kurdish political party in Turkey that made into the Turkish parliament with the help of the pact they made with Social Democrat Party (SHP), a mainstream leftist Party. In fact, the leading figures who established HEP were previous members of the SHP.²⁹ “First and foremost, this pact gave HEP an opportunity to participate in elections it would have otherwise been barred from on the basis of a legal technicality” (Barkey, 1998). HEP candidates run in the elections on SHP tickets and the party won 22 seats in the parliament. Some of these Kurdish deputies soon caused uproar in the parliament when they spoke Kurdish in swearing-in ceremony. This led to a political crisis that ended up with the expulsion of Kurdish law makers from the SHP and later with the shutdown of the HEP by the Turkish constitutional court in 1993.

As for the political demands that the party raised, there were two political postures that the HEP reflected in two party programs respectively declared in 1990 and 1992. The first party program used a moderate and universal language and introduced the party as a representative of all oppressed segments of the Turkish society such as peasants, workers, retired, and unemployed. This party program carefully situated the cultural rights of the Kurds in a universal language of human rights. Yet, the aforementioned political crisis erupted in the swearing-in ceremony and subsequent developments radicalized the party’s political program. As a reflection of this turn, the party published a new program in 1992 with a more precise reference to the Kurds:

²⁹ Kurds from all persuasions traditionally figured in mainstream Turkish political parties before pro-Kurdish political parties came into the scene in 1990s. Thus, those who founded the pro-Kurdish HEP were previous deputies of the SHP (Barkey, 1998).

HEP remains devoted until the end to the principle of the "People's Fundamental Right to Self-Determination" in the solving of the Kurdish Problem. In this framework it will whole-heartedly support, without any reservations . . . every means of reaching a solution including a referendum, a federation, and similar solutions that are developed by the people (Quoted in Watts, 1999, p. 637).

As for the cultural rights, the second party program directly mentioned “the existence of Kurdish people,” which they argued was not recognized by the state:

Today, to propose the existence of "the Kurdish People" is reason for a party to be closed. . . . In order to solve the Kurdish Problem, it is first of all necessary for all of the legal, administrative and social obstacles that prevent free debate on this problem to be removed (quoted in Watts, 1999, p. 636).

The constitutional court banned HEP in 1993 and Kurdish political entrepreneurs established new a pro-Kurdish political party, which was DEP. This was a very short-lived pro-Kurdish party. DEP could endure just one year after its foundation in 1993. The Turkish constitutional court shut down DEP in 1994 and the members of the party were arrested (Barkey, 1998; Watts, 1999). DEP was replaced with HADEP, which was the first pro-Kurdish political party that could manage to run in the elections on its party ticket in 1995 and 1999.³⁰ The party's vote shares were in these elections 4.5% and 4.75% respectively, which referred to a support base that indicated presence of a sustained Kurdish ethnic group in Turkish political and cultural landscape. However, the Party was shut down in 2003 by the Turkish constitutional court on the

³⁰ On the processes, debates and outcomes of the foundations and closures of HEP, DEP and HADEP see Watt (1999), Demir (2005), and Barkey (1998).

grounds that it had become “a centre of illegal activities.” This charge was referring to the assumed tie between the PKK and the HADEP that HADEP never officially admitted.

Like its predecessors, HADEP in its party program also used a careful language while dealing with the Kurdish issue, a language that intended not to provoke Turkish establishment for legal sanctions that the HEP and DEP faced. In other words, political demands were “framed more generally in the discourse of democratization and human rights—goals shared by many non-Kurds in Turkey as well” (Watts, 2006, p. 132). According to the party program, Kurdish problem is the main obstacle in front of a democratic Turkey in the real sense of the term. It was an immediate issue that urgently needed to be dealt with. The first step for the resolution of the issue was to constitutionally recognize the Kurdish the identity and culture.

HADEP was replaced with DEHAP which was founded in 1997 as a surrogate political party. While the closure case was going on, the HADEP’s candidates run in the 2002 elections on DEHAP’s ticket. This was a tactic developed for getting around the problems that a possible closure decision by the constitutional court would create. The public prosecutor’s office opened a closure case against HADEP as well with the same charges directed against previous pro-Kurdish political parties: violating the country’s ban on ethnically based parties, aiding the PKK (thus becoming a centre of illegal activities), and threatening the indivisible unity of the country (Watts, 2006, p. 129). DEHAP merged with the DTP in 2005.

DTP introduced two significant innovations to the Kurdish political movement in Turkey. First innovation was about electoral strategy. In order to avoid high electoral threshold (10%) in 2007 elections, the members of the party decided to run in the elections as independent candidates instead of running on the party’s ticket. They, in other words, took advantage of a

legal loophole and gained 22 seats in the Turkish parliament. The second innovation was about political demands. The DTP's political program corresponded to a clear shift in terms of political objectives, especially compared to the Kurdish political demands in the 1990s. Party program promoted the notions of "democratic republic," which unequivocally referred to political autonomy (decentralization of power by strengthening local administrations), and "equal life in the common homeland," which referred to the constitutional recognition of minority identities and rights (Kavak, 2012, p. 153).³¹ These demands were clearly articulated in the party program, and communicated and discussed by the party's deputies and members in many platforms. The party program, like its antecedents, used a universal language of democracy and human rights when mentioning these two notions by avoiding the impression that these demands solely addressed the Kurds. It was especially stressed that democratic autonomy and equal citizenship were required for every major regions and groups in the country for a more democratic and peaceful unity between them. The DTP deputies, however, clearly addressed the Kurdish issue while communicating their party's program.³²

The constitutional court closed DTP in 2009, on the basis of a familiar charge, for "becoming a centre of illegal activities against the indivisible unity of the nation and the state." BDP replaced DTP and represented the Kurdish political movement until merging with the HDP in 2014. BDP's party program was no different than that of the DTP in terms of political demands raised and the language in which these demands were framed. The notion of democratic

³¹ Some studies find a parallel between the ideas articulated in Abdullah Ocalan's prison writings published in 2005 and the change in the political demands of the DTP and subsequent pro-Kurdish parties. Ocalan, following American Marxist thinker Murray Bookchin, proposes that nation-state does not provide a solution for the Kurdish problem, democratic autonomy can instead be the solution. This refers to a move away from national independence to political autonomy. On this connection between Ocalan's ideas and the political demands voiced by the pro-Kurdish political parties after 2005 see Leezenberg (2016) and Jongerden (2017).

³² On DTP's party program, work and activities in the parliament see Kavak (2012), Watt (2006).

autonomy and the institutional recognition of minority identities continued to be the backbone of the Party's political demands. The right to have primary education in mother languages was also strongly emphasized by the party program:

BDP, while regarding the creation of libertarian and democratic society as its fundamental principle; declares, in conformity with this principle that the Turkish Republic has been established by the Turks and Kurdish people and all other ethnic groups and that the roots of fraternity between people lies in the depths of history. Hence, Peace and Democracy Party perceives the solution to the Kurdish Problem and the peaceful future of people in the establishment of the Democratic Republic and in the principle of "free co-existence in the common homeland." In this context, the party is a staunch supporter in all platforms, of organized civil society, a social structure within which people can build their own identities and of the making of a new constitution in conformity with universal law; one that promotes a peaceful, libertarian, egalitarian, and participatory society.... BDP strives for the provision of the right to education in mother tongue for everyone without discrimination...(BDP, 2013).

Political autonomy, constitutional recognition of minority identities, and right to education in mother tongue were clearly articulated in the party program, again framed in a universal language of democracy and human rights. BDP's members later joined its fraternal political party HDP in 2014 and HDP has become the representative of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey since then. HDP adopted the political and cultural demands BDP had previously raised and promoted, in this sense HDP is a continuation of BDP.

Back to the PKK, the political activism in the legal sphere has proceeded in parallel with the PKK's strategic use of violence until the capture of its leader in 1999. The violent activities of the PKK and the state's harsh reprisals escalated in the early 1990s, resulting in the thousands of deaths, injuries and displacements. These armed clashes between the PKK and the Turkish

security forces lost magnitude when the founding leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, was captured in 1999, which forced the PKK to significantly reduce violent activities for some years. It was the PKK that initiated and formed a sustainable Kurdish ethnic group out of Kurdish ethnic category by strategic use of violence. However it was the pro-Kurdish political parties that have kept this ethnic group alive when the PKK became weaker after the capture of its leader in 1999 (Watts, 2006). But violence escalated again in 2014 in some new forms along with guerilla tactics and civil strife, the PKK has sought to establish autonomous political structures in Kurdish provinces, turning Kurdish cities into battlefields and posing a direct threat to the sovereignty of the Turkish state. The PKK's new move led the government to impose a curfew on several cities and install a military regime in some districts in order to force the PKK militants out of these cities. The resurgence of violence between the PKK and the Turkish security forces, and the failed coup attempt in 2016 have led the government to adopt hawkish policies towards the Kurdish political movements. As part of these policies, the HDP's co-leader Selahattin Demirtaş, some other deputies of the party and many local representatives have been arrested since 2016 on the basis of the charges of assisting or having ties with the PKK, which is seen as a terrorist organization by the state. The PKK and the pro-Kurdish HDP now represent the Kurdish political movement in Turkey and both organizations raise the same political and cultural demands.

Kurdish political demands raised and voiced by pro-Kurdish political parties can be classified under two main headings: political demands and cultural demands. Political demands include the constitutional recognition of Kurdish existence, the decentralization of power and, as a result, a regional political autonomy for the Kurds. Cultural demands involve “the right to publish, broadcast and teach Kurdish in public schools and to form Kurdish cultural...

associations” (Watts, 2006, p. 131). Pro-Kurdish politicians use any platforms possible to voice these demands. They convey and communicate these demands through interviews made with newspapers or televisions, speeches given in the parliament and during election campaigns, and direct interaction with the Kurdish voters.

Conclusion

The strategies Kurdish political entrepreneurs used in 1920s and 1930s (tribal and religious revolts), and in 1960s and 1970s (literary and political activism) failed to form a sustainable ethnic group out of the Kurdish ethnic category, yet the PKK, by strategic use of violence, has succeeded in mobilizing a significant portion of the Kurdish ethnic category for its political objectives, first for an independent state and later for regional autonomy. When the PKK became weaker after 1990s, Pro-Kurdish political parties played a significant role in mobilizing the Kurdish ethnic group for certain political and cultural objectives. It is now clear that there is a Kurdish ethnic group in Turkey fighting for Kurdish political autonomy. However, as I will show in the next chapter, a significant portion of the Kurds do not support pro-Kurdish political parties despite such provocations as high levels of violence, economic deprivation, and extreme ethnic polarization. In this chapter, I examine Kurdish ethnic category and Kurdish ethnic group from a macro perspective. To this end, I first discuss main cultural attributes that constitute the cultural content of the Kurdish ethnic category that has been constructed by the everyday practices of the Kurds in the historical process. Second, I discuss the actors, processes and strategies of the formation of the Kurdish ethnic group since the inception of the Turkish Republic in 1923. In the next chapter I will examine Kurdish ethnic category and Kurdish ethnic group from micro (individual) level of analysis. The next chapter will be an empirical application of the conceptual model that I develop in the first chapter.

Chapter 4 – A Micro Level Analysis of Kurdish Ethnic Category and Ethnic Group in Turkey

In the previous chapter, I provide a macro analysis of Kurdish ethnic category and Kurdish ethnic group in Turkey by discussing the main defining cultural elements of the Kurdish ethnic category as well as the ethnic-group making strategies employed by the Kurdish political elites since the creation of the Turkish Republic. I suggest that the leaders of the PKK have successfully been able to construct a sustainable Kurdish ethnic group out of Kurdish ethnic category by resorting to the strategic use of violence. In other words, the PKK leaders could master support from a sufficient portion of the members of the Kurdish ethnic category in Turkey that led to the emergence of a viable Kurdish ethnic group continuously struggling for certain political and cultural goals.

There are two main objectives of this chapter. First, as a complement to the macro analysis of Kurdish ethnic category and Kurdish ethnic group in the previous chapter, I will assess the implications of the terms ethnic category and ethnic group in the Kurdish case from a micro level perspective. I will show how ethnic group and ethnic category look like or can be measured at the individual level. Second, I will provide evidence for utility of my conceptual model by showing its significant implications in the Kurdish case in Turkey. By applying my conceptual model to the Kurdish case, I will reveal the fact that ethnic identification is not fixed but processual and fluid in the sense that individuals can emotionally or instrumentally switch between ethnic identification forms. I will also empirically illustrate that a significant number of the Kurds in Turkey distance themselves from the nationalist Kurdish political organizations (the PKK and its political wings) despite the fact that this number increases or decreases over the years, meaning that being a member of the Kurdish ethnic category does not automatically make

someone a member of the Kurdish ethnic group in Turkey. Despite the presence of important encouraging factors such as high level of ethnic polarization, large population size and ethnic violence, sometimes more than half of the Kurds do not support pro-Kurdish political parties.

This chapter includes two main sections. In the first section, I will discuss the empirical implications of the terms ethnic category and ethnic group in the Kurdish case from a micro level perspective. This section will illustrate that the terms ethnic category and ethnic group refer to different realities in the case of the Kurds of Turkey. In the second section, I will apply my conceptual model to the Kurdish case by analyzing two highly representative survey data collected in Turkey. In this section, I will show how the members of Kurdish ethnic category adopt ethnic identification forms and, in turn, how the identification forms the Kurds adopt are correlated with their political and cultural demands.

Kurdish Ethnic Category and Kurdish Ethnic Group

In this section, I will examine the Kurdish ethnic category and Kurdish ethnic group from a micro (individual) level perspective as reflected in survey data that were collected in Turkey.³³ Note that this survey is a relatively old one and may not reflect the current situation in Turkey. The reason why I use this survey data is that it is one of the most extensive surveys on identity perceptions of Turkish people conducted in Turkey with over ten thousand respondents from different demographic and ethnic backgrounds. I will be able to show how to measure ethnic group and ethnic category membership from an individual level perspective. My purpose in this

³³ KONDA, an Istanbul-based Research Company, conducted this important public survey in 2010. It is a highly representative and the most extensive survey on identity issues conducted in Turkey. Also note that KONDA is an independent agency that has a reputation for its accurate and unbiased election and public opinion polls.

section is to show that “a category is not a group. It is at best a potential basis for group-formation or groupness” (Brubaker, 2004, p. 12).

Before addressing the empirical data, I will briefly review the Turkish electoral system and the performances of the pro-Kurdish political parties that will give a general perspective for the subsequent analyses. To start with Turkish electoral system, the construct of Turkey’s legislative body reflects a proportional representation system by which seats in parliament are allocated to parties according to the votes they receive in the general/legislative elections. Political parties are highly centralized, in that nominations for parliament seats are decided mainly by each party’s leaders and their close associates. Thus, it may be argued that voters cast their votes for the parties, not for the candidates from their local constituency. The majority of voters may not know the names of the representatives of their electoral districts. Hence, the parties and their leaders determine voters’ choices. Within this system, the electoral threshold requires political parties to reach 10% of total votes in order to be represented in parliament. A party will need around 4 to 5 million votes to make into the Turkish parliament depending upon voter turnout.

This high electoral threshold was issued by the military rule after the military coup in 1980. High electoral thresholds aim to first discourage voters to vote for small parties and second, as a result, to keep relatively small parties out of the parliament. Despite this high electoral threshold, however, pro-Kurdish political parties have never given up running for the Turkish parliament since 1990s when for the first time they found proper ground for legal political activities based on ethnic concerns. Although they many times failed to pass the threshold, they, over the years, have secured a solid electoral support from the Kurdish voters

and developed smart strategies to get around this high electoral threshold to win seats in the Turkish parliament as I will discuss later in this chapter.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, HADEP was the first pro-Kurdish political party that participated in legislative elections in Turkey in 1995 and 1999, garnering vote shares of 4.5% and 4.75% respectively. DEHAP, which was a continuation of HADEP, won 6.2% of the total votes in the 2002 elections. Given the 10% electoral threshold, these parties failed to win seats in the parliament. In response, Kurdish political elites developed a new strategy to get around the electoral threshold. Instead of running on a party's ticket, members of the pro-Kurdish political party (DTP), which succeeded DEHAP, participated in the 2007 elections as independent candidates, mostly in the Kurdish electoral districts because Turkey's election threshold of 10% only applies to parties. This strategy succeeded, and Kurdish independent candidates won 22 seats in the parliament, a victory they could not have achieved if they had run on the DTP's ticket due to the electoral threshold. The total vote share of all pro-Kurdish independent candidates was slightly more than 4%, which could not meet the electoral threshold. Kurdish political elites also employed the same strategy in the legislative elections in 2011, in which they increased the numbers of their parliament seats from 22 to 36 and vote share from 4% to 7%.

Four years later, Kurdish political elites again changed their elections strategy and participated in the two successive national elections held in 2015 as a political party, the HDP (successor of the BDP), instead of nominating independent candidates. They won 13% of total votes (59 seats in the parliament), passing the 10% electoral threshold for the first time. Although running on a party ticket initially seemed to be a big risk, some propitious factors encouraged Kurdish political elites to take this course of action. First, the ruling Justice and

Development Party (AKP), which had been in power since 2002, had initiated an opening of the democratic process in relation to the Kurdish issue after 2007, a move that accelerated after 2009. As part of this democratic opening, some constraints on Kurdish political and cultural rights were relaxed or completely lifted, which led to establishing Kurdish studies programs at the universities, opening a state TV channel broadcasting in Kurdish, and legalizing private Kurdish language courses and election campaigns in Kurdish. These reforms provided Kurdish political entrepreneurs with a chance to reach and convey their projects, ideas to the larger segments of the Kurdish ethnic category.

Second, on December 17, 2013 Turkey woke up a day whose repercussions is still being strongly felt now in the country. In the early morning, Istanbul and Ankara Police departments, with the order of public prosecutors, raided and searched some residential addresses on the bases of corruption and graft allegations and took many prominent AKP figures (including sons of four ministers, a mayor of one district of Istanbul, the top official of one of the state banks and some businessmen) into custody. On December 25, 2013 a second wave of police raids and searches targeted then Prime Minister Erdogan's son and a number of other businessmen who had close ties to the Prime Minister. Erdogan has rejected all allegations and cast the investigations as a plot against his government planned and organized by Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen and his followers who have purportedly infiltrated the judiciary and the security forces. Regardless of whether those corruption investigations were part of a plot against the reputation of the AKP government or not, they played a role in the decision of the Kurdish political elites to run in the election as a party rather than as independent candidates.³⁴

³⁴ The fight between the AKP government and the Gülen Movement led to the biggest political crisis in the Turkish political history, a crisis that includes a failed coup attempt, massive purges in public sectors including judiciary, bureaucracy, military and police forces. The repercussions of this crisis are still being strongly felt at the time of this writing.

Third, probably, the most encouraging factor behind the BDP's decision to run on the party's ticket was that, according to several pre-election public surveys, many non-Kurdish electorates who disliked the ruling AKP viewed enabling the pro-Kurdish BDP to surpass the 10% threshold as the most feasible strategy to prevent the AKP from forming a single party government. This issue was extensively covered by the Turkish media outlets. As a last point, the fight between the AKP and Gülen Movement forced the ruling AKP to shift to harsher policies towards the Kurdish issue and to adopt a Nationalist discourse in order to win Turkish nationalist votes. This shift in policy alienated some Kurdish voters who voted for the AKP in the previous elections.

All these factors together with some survey results that indicated the pro-Kurdish HDP passing the 10% electoral threshold gave HDP leaders the confidence to participate in the elections held in June 2015 on the party's ticket. The expectations of the Kurdish political elites came to fruition and the HDP passed the electoral threshold with 13.16% vote share. For the first time since its foundation in 2001, the ruling AKP failed to win enough votes to gain the majority needed for a single party government. However, it must be noted that because many non-Kurdish electorates also voted for the HDP, it would be misleading to conclude that the HDP surpassed the electoral threshold because of Kurdish solidarity. In other words, the results of the June elections in 2015 do not provide a good measure of the support the HDP mustered from the Kurdish electorates.

When the political parties failed to form a coalition government, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, decided to call new parliamentary elections, which were held in October of 2015, and this time the HDP received 10.7% of the votes, meaning its vote share decreased 2.5% since the elections held just five months before. There are obvious reasons behind this

decrease. After the June elections, a cycle of violence erupted in Turkey, including ISIL's Ankara bombings that targeted pro-HDP masses and armed clashes between the PKK and Turkish security forces, the latter especially instrumental in weakening the HDP's hand and calling its legitimacy into question. Pro-government media were especially harsh in targeting the HDP, deeming it responsible for the PKK attacks or blaming the party leaders for being silent against the PKK's violent attacks. In addition to this, the PKK's strategy to pursue a war in the Kurdish towns by digging trenches to prevent Turkish security forces from entering largest neighborhoods led to Turkish security forces to adopt harsher military measures to force the PKK militants out of the towns. These violent conflicts between the PKK militants and the Turkish security forces affected daily lives of many Kurds for months that worked at the expense of the pro-Kurdish HDP.

The Turkish public was divided into two camps in interpreting the reasons behind the eruption of the violence. The anti-AKP camp claimed that the ruling AKP had intentionally resorted to violence against the PKK in order to drive the pro-Kurdish HDP below 10% electoral threshold, which would secure a single-party government. The pro-AKP camp held the PKK and the HDP responsible for the escalation of violence. No matter where the blame actually lay, the AKP won 49% of the votes, an 8% increase over the last election, while the HDP lost 2.5% of its previous vote share.

After the elections in October 2015, the AKP government has changed its policies towards the Kurdish issue from an open and democratic stance to intolerant one. The political turmoil that the AKP government have gone through including corruption charges and subsequent struggle with the Gülen movement, and the failed military coup attempt in July 2016 played a significant role in this shift. For the AKP government and its leader Recep Tayyip

Erdogan opposition groups and Gülen movement plotted to destroy the AKP governments credibility with allegedly fake corruption charges. After winning one municipal and one national elections after the corruption charges as well as preventing an attempted military coup allegedly committed by Gülenist military officers led to the hardening of the AKP government on many issues including the Kurdish question. The co-leader of the pro-Kurdish HDP, Selahattin Demirtaş, was detained with eleven HDP lawmakers few months after the failed coup attempt as part of an investigation into supporting terrorism and Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the outlawed PKK. Some other the HDP's significant figures were later detained as well.

	Legislative Elections (1995 – 2015)						
Pro-Kurdish Parties	1995	1999	2002	2007	2011	2015 (June)	2015 (November)
HADEP	4.5%	4.75%					
DEHAP			6.2%				
DTP				4% (22 seats)			
BDP					7% (36 seats)		
HDP						13.16% (80 seats)	10.7% (59 seats)

Table 4.1. Vote shares of pro-Kurdish political parties since 1995

These election results provide us with important information. Kurds constitute at least 18.5% of the total population and therefore of the total voters in Turkey. Based on this percentage, since 1995, when a pro-Kurdish political party first participated in legislative elections, the majority of the Kurds in Turkey have not supported pro-Kurdish political parties with the exception of the last two elections. The entrepreneurial elites did succeed in forming an

ethnic group with a solid support base; yet it did not comprise the majority of the Kurds. In Brubaker's (2002) terminology, a significant portion of the members of the Kurdish ethnic category in Turkey were not members of the Kurdish ethnic group that sought political autonomy for the Kurds. They generally voted for non-ethnic political parties, predominantly for the ruling AKP. In Brubaker's view, not all the Kurds who voted for the pro-Kurdish political parties should be considered as members of the Kurdish ethnic group because some might not share the political objectives of the Kurdish political elites. However, if we suppose they did share these goals, it still remains that a significant portion of the Kurds did not join the Kurdish ethnic group, a situation that holds up to the time of this writing.

To illustrate this important point, I draw on two highly representative survey data collected by the Istanbul-based Konda Research Company, which is one of the leading research agencies in Turkey. The first survey (2010) included 10,393 respondents of voting age from 59 of the 81 provinces of Turkey. The second one was conducted in November 2014 with 2,464 respondents. Konda conducts face to face interviews on the basis of a representative national sample. This survey data was collected one year before the June 2011 legislative elections. To be sure, the data do not represent the current situation in Turkey, yet it still gives us an opportunity to see how the terms ethnic category and ethnic group may address different phenomena in the Kurdish case. Importantly, the survey was designed to assess how Turkish people reacted to identity issues with a specific emphasis on the Kurdish issue. Thus, the data help us clearly identify the difference between ethnic category and ethnic group in the case of the Kurds in Turkey. I will also analyze the second and more recent survey data that collected in 2015 as a supplement to the data collected in 2010.

To measure ethnic category membership through survey data, I follow the lead of Fearon and Laitin (2010) and use parentage. I consider all respondents at least one of whose parents was of Kurdish origin as members of the Kurdish ethnic category. With this measure, 1,927 respondents, representing 18.5% of the voting age population in Turkey, qualified as members of the Kurdish ethnic category. This is, of course, not to say that all of these 1,927 respondents considered themselves as Kurds, and indeed, 403, more than 20%, self-identified as Turks. This self-identification did not change the reality that they could legitimately claim membership in the Kurdish ethnic category if they chose to, so the percentage of respondents representing the Kurdish ethnic category stands at 18.5%.

The survey data clearly indicate that the majority of the members of the Kurdish ethnic category preferred non-ethnic political parties to the pro-Kurdish BDP, which was seeking political autonomy for the Kurds. Of the 1,927 members of the Kurdish ethnic category, 40.48% (780) planned to vote for the ruling AKP, 27% (536) for the pro-Kurdish BDP, 11% (212) for the main opposition CHP, and 2.02% for the second opposition MHP while 11.21% (216) were undecided at the time of the survey, and the rest either weren't going to vote or didn't respond. These results indicate that in 2010 the majority of the members of the Kurdish ethnic category politically distanced themselves from the pro-Kurdish BDP. Only 27% of the members of the Kurdish ethnic category were also members of the Kurdish ethnic group, showing that ethnic category membership does not necessarily refer to ethnic group membership. Again, I do not argue that these results indicate the current party preferences of the Kurds since the survey analyzed conducted in 2010. As I pointed out above, my objective here is to show that ethnic category membership does not necessarily make someone a member of the ethnic group.

Party	Number of respondents (N=1927)	Percentage
AKP (ruling party)	780	40.48
BDP (pro-Kurdish party)	536	27.82
CHP (secular)	212	11.00
MHP (Turkish nationalist)	39	2.02
Other	40	2.08
Undecided	216	11.21
Won't vote	91	4.72
No Response	13	0.67

Table 4.2. Party vote shares among the members of the Kurdish ethnic category in 2010

Of 1927 respondents who could claim membership to Kurdish ethnic category, 79% (1524) identified with their Kurdish ethnic background. The party preferences of these respondents clearly indicate that identifying with Kurdish ethnic background also does not necessarily refer to ethnic group membership: 38.85% preferred the ruling AKP, 35.04% the pro-Kurdish BDP, and 8.07% the main opposition CHP. That is, still the majority of the voting age Kurds who identified with their Kurdish background preferred the non-ethnic political parties in 2010. The vote share of the pro-BDP increases around 7% (from 27.82% to 35.04) compared to the party preferences of the members of the Kurdish ethnic category. However, still the majority of the respondents who identified with their Kurdish ethnic background planned to vote for the non-ethnic political parties. Table 4. 3. indicates the party preferences of the Kurds who self-identified as Kurds.

Party	Number of respondents N=1524	Percentage
AKP (ruling party)	592	38.85
BDP (pro-Kurdish party)	534	35.04
CHP (secular)	123	8.07
MHP (Turkish nationalist)	13	0.85
Other	25	1.65
Undecided	169	11.09
Won't vote	58	3.81
No Response	10	0.66

Table 4. 3. The party preferences of self-identified Kurds.

Some may argue that the Kurds who did not vote for the pro-Kurdish BDP had weak or no attachment to their ethnic identities, an intuitively convincing argument, especially in light of the 20% (403 respondents) who could have claimed Kurdish ethnic identity but did not. In order to test this argument, I analyzed the party preferences of the 1,112 members of the Kurdish ethnic category who identified with their Kurdish ethnic background as well as stressed that they had strong attachment to their ethnic identity. The party preferences of these Kurds show that although explicit ethnic attachment increased the vote share of the pro-Kurdish BDP, the majority of the Kurds with explicit ethnic attachment still intended to vote for the non-ethnic political parties in 2010: 37.41% preferred the ruling AKP, 39.75% the pro-Kurdish BDP, and 6.83% the main opposition CHP. That is, the majority planned to vote for non-ethnic political parties instead of the pro-Kurdish BDP that was struggling for Kurdish political autonomy. Table 4.4. displays party preferences of the Kurds who were attached to their ethnic background.

Party	Number of respondents (N =1,112)	Percentage
AKP (ruling party)	416	37.41
BDP (pro-Kurdish party)	442	39.75
CHP (secular)	76	6.83
MHP (Turkish nationalist)	7	0.63
Other	14	1.26
Undecided	112	10.07
Won't vote	38	3.42
No Response	7	0.63

Table 4. 4. Party preferences of the Kurds with strong ethnic attachment.

The point here is not that the Kurdish political elites in Turkey failed to form a Kurdish ethnic group struggling for certain political and cultural rights. Indeed, they did form such an ethnic-based political party or group with a wide support base among the Kurds. However, the data show that despite the presence of many encouraging factors, a significant number of Kurdish ethnic category members preferred not to join the Kurdish ethnic group formed by the Kurdish political entrepreneurs no matter how highly attached to their ethnic background they might be. The conceptual framework Brubaker (2002) suggests helps us explore this significant point and opens venues for further research in order to better understand why so large a majority shunned the Kurdish nationalist movements that claimed to advance their political rights.

To be sure, in every ethnic conflict, there are ethnic members who defect from their co-ethnics for instrumental reasons but the number of these defectors, especially in violent ethnic conflicts is relatively very small. What makes Kurdish case particularly interesting is that the number of the Kurds who stay away from ethnonationalist Kurdish movements sometimes exceeds the number of the Kurds who support pro-ethnic political organizations.

Brubaker (2002) is right when he advises analysts to be careful about groupist approaches that may lead scholars to overlook significant facts on the ground. He proposes his conceptual distinction to point to the fact that ethnic groupness is a variable or happening phenomenon. As I indicated above, the size of the Kurdish ethnic group has changed over time. Thus, ethnic groups are not constant but in the making in terms of the size of the members. The Kurdish case indicates that Brubaker's distinction between ethnic category and ethnic group is applicable even to the contexts where ethnic groups and violent ethnic conflicts are present. For instance, studies of the Kurds of Turkey generally adopt a groupist approach and focus solely on the Kurds who support the Kurdish political movements, including pro-Kurdish political parties and the PKK, neglecting the fact that the majority of the Kurds stay away from these ethnic political organizations (Criss, 1995; Natali, 2004; Özcan, 2006; Watts, 2010; Yeğen, 1996). Studying the demands, attitudes and identity perceptions of these Kurds may lead to significant theoretical and conceptual insights that I will examine in the last three chapters of this study.

The Ethnic Identification Forms and the Kurdish Case

The conceptual model that I developed in the first chapter can help us better understand the relationship between ethnic category and ethnic group in ethnic settings. Constructivist studies of ethnicity have demonstrated that ethnicity and ethnic identity is not fixed but constructed and fluid (Barth, 1969; Brubaker, 1994, 2002; Chandra & Boulet, 2012; Chandra & Wilkinson, 2008; Comaroff, 1995; Eriksen, 2002; Giuliano, 2011). And they have also illustrated that ethnic identities are contextual and processual in the sense that ethnic self-understandings may display differences across time and place, and across individuals, “but they may be stable as well” (Brubaker, 2004, p. 45; Chandra, 2012b; Posner, 2005; Shahrani, 1984; Waters, 1999). In

order to understand the elusive and contextual nature of ethnic self-understandings or identifications, the model I developed in the first chapter provides a good analytical framework.

To recall my conceptual framework, I propose that there are four possible forms of ethnic identification that ethnic members may adopt in social and political domains.³⁵ My conceptual framework indicates how ethnic individuals socially and politically use ethnic identity. These ethnic identity forms are 1) socially and politically active ethnic identification, 2) socially passive but politically active ethnic identification, 3) socially active but politically passive ethnic identification, and 4) socially and politically passive ethnic identification. Because I fully discuss these forms in the first chapter, it suffices here to focus on the measures of these identity forms.

I suggest that ethnic identities have implications in the social and political domains of life. In these domains an ethnic identity may either be active or passive for a particular member of an ethnic category. In social domain, I propose, an ethnic identity is active for a member of ethnic category if she or he has a strong attachment to it. In addition to identifying with the ethnic identity, one has to express attachment to his or her ethnic background as well if we are to speak a socially active ethnic identity for that particular individual.³⁶ An ethnic identity is socially passive, on the other hand, if one has a weak attachment or does not identify with his or her ethnic background at all. As for politically active or passive forms of identity, I propose that an ethnic identity is politically active for a member of an ethnic category if one supports ethnic political organizations (insurgent organizations or ethnic political parties) struggling for certain

³⁵ As Brubaker (2004) suggests, identification refers to a complex process regarding ethnic self-understanding compared to the term identity, which, Brubaker thinks, mistakenly refers to a perfect fit between individuals, identities and social locations. Following the lead of Brubaker, I prefer using identification instead of identity.

³⁶ For Chandra (2012c), “activated identities are those identities from among the nominal set that are used to describe an individual, by choice or assignation” (p. 101). In my conceptualization, assignation by outsiders does not cause activation of an ethnic identity on the part of ethnic individuals. For an identity to be socially active one must have attachment to it. Identifying with an ethnic identity is not enough for that identity to be socially active, there must exist certain level of attachment as well.

political goals including independence to political autonomy. As I discussed in the first chapter, affective, instrumental or ideological factors can play roles in shaping individuals' decisions to adopt active or passive forms of ethnic identification in social and political domains.

In order to measure four forms of ethnic identity at the individual level data, I will suggest following strategies.³⁷ For socially and politically active ethnic identification one must have a strong attachment to one's ethnic background and at the same time vote for ethnic political parties. For socially passive and politically active ethnic identification one must have weak or no attachment to one's ethnic background but vote for ethnic political parties. For socially active but politically passive ethnic identification one must have strong attachment to one's ethnic identity but not vote for ethnic political parties; and for socially and politically passive ethnic identification one must have weak or no attachment to one's ethnic background and not vote for ethnic political parties.³⁸ In order to measure ethnic attachment, I use the survey questions "how important is to be defined by your ethnic identity." Among the choices are "very important", important," "slightly important," and "not at all important." I consider those who picked "very important," and "important" as adopting socially active ethnic identity, and those who chose "slightly important, and "not at all important" as adopting socially passive ethnic identity.

³⁷ Here, I do not propose that those ethnic members who vote for non-ethnic political parties have no political concerns stemmed from their ethnic backgrounds. While voting for non-ethnic political parties, their ethnic backgrounds may, indeed, play a role in preferring that particular non-ethnic political party to the ethnic ones. What I am proposing here is to differentiate between ethnic members who follow ethnic political elites and those who do not. Moreover, those who support ethnic political elites are more likely to have stronger sense of groupness or commonality than those who do not.

³⁸ Support for ethnic warring organizations also can be used as a measure for politically active identity forms in contexts where only these warring organizations lead ethnic mobilization. In Kurdish case, however, pro-Kurdish political parties and politicians lead and mobilize ethnic masses for certain political goals.

Note that, according to my conceptual framework, those who adopt first two forms of ethnic identification (politically active forms) constitute the members of the Kurdish ethnic group. I consider support for pro-Kurdish political parties as a measure of membership of the Kurdish ethnic group. Table 4. 5. summarizes the identity forms and their measures.

Forms of ethnic identification	Indicators
Socially and politically active	Strong ethnic attachment and support for ethnic political parties
Socially passive but politically active	Weak or no ethnic attachment and support for ethnic political parties
Socially active but politically passive	Strong ethnic attachment and no support for ethnic political parties
Socially and politically passive	Weak or no ethnic attachment and no support for political parties

Table 4. 5. Ethnic Identifications Forms and Measures

As I will illustrate in the rest of this section, the majority of the Kurdish respondents adopted socially active ethnic identification in 2010, meaning that the majority of the Kurds had strong attachment to their ethnic background. Of the Kurds who could claim membership to the Kurdish ethnic category due to the parentage rule, %57 stressed that they had strong attachment to their Kurdish background. It means that 57% of the Kurds adopted socially active forms of ethnic identification. The remaining 43% adopted socially passive ethnic identification. On the other hand, %27.8 adopted politically active ethnic identification by expressing support for the pro-Kurdish political party, meaning that only 27.8% of Kurdish respondents constituted the members of the Kurdish ethnic/political group in 2010. The remaining 72.18% adopted politically passive ethnic identification, that is to say that they did not prefer to be the members of the Kurdish ethnic group.

Among those who stressed support for the pro-Kurdish political party, 82.4% have strong ethnic attachment while remaining 17.6% respondents have weak or no attachment to their ethnic backgrounds. This means that 82.4% of the Kurds who stressed support for the Kurdish political party adopted socially and political active ethnic identification and remaining 17.6% adopted socially passive but politically active ethnic identification. They together constituted the members of the Kurdish ethnic group in Turkey in 2010.

Of the Kurds who expressed support for the ruling AKP, 53.3% had strong ethnic attachment to their ethnic background and the rest (46.7%) stressed that they had weak or no ethnic attachment. In other words, 53.3% of the Kurds who stressed support for the AKP adopted socially active (strong attachment to ethnic identity) but politically passive ethnic identification (not supporting pro-Kurdish political party) and remaining 46.7% adopted socially and politically passive ethnic identity. Among those who stressed support for the main opposition CHP, only 35.8% (76) stressed that they had strong attachment to their ethnic background. It means that 35.8% of the CHP supporters adopted socially active but politically passive ethnic identification. The remaining 64.2% adopted socially and politically passive ethnic identification. Table 4. 6. summarizes the distribution of the four forms of ethnic identification in 2010, based on the measures I discussed above.

	Socially Active		Socially Passive		Kurdish Ethnic Group N= 536 (26.7%)	Kurdish Ethnic Category N= 1927 (100%)
	Form 1		Form 2			
Politically Active	N= 442 (22.9%)		N= 94 (4.8%)			
Politically Passive	Form 3 N=670 (34.7%)		Form 4 N=721 (37.4%)			

Table 4. 6. The distribution of Kurdish ethnic members along four forms of ethnic identification in 2010.

As table 4. 6. clearly indicates, Kurdish ethnic group is a subset of the Kurdish ethnic category in terms of the composition of the members as I theoretically proposed in the first chapter. The members of Kurdish ethnic group are at the same time the members of the Kurdish ethnic category. However, the members of the ethnic category are not necessarily the members of the Kurdish ethnic group that struggle for political and cultural autonomy. Survey data indicate that out of 1927 respondents, only 536 respondents adopted politically active ethnic identification, meaning that only 27.7 percent of the Kurds qualified for the membership to the Kurdish political ethnic group. On the other hand, 62.3% (1391) embraced politically passive forms of ethnic identification (form 3 and form 4), which means that they distanced themselves from the ethnic political organizations. In this sense, they are the members of the Kurdish ethnic category but not of the Kurdish ethnic group.

This refers to a blind spot in the study of ethnicity, a significant point that Brubaker (2002, 2004; Brubaker & Stamatov, 2004) remarks in his recent studies. Despite the presence of

many encouraging factors, i.e., high ethnic polarization, violence, and a significant population size, a significant number of the Kurdish voters did not provide support for Kurdish political organizations. Their perceptions of Kurdish ethnic identity, the way they approach to the cultural and political issues regarding the Kurdish question, and their political and cultural demands may significantly differ from the members of the ethnic group, an important point that needs to be carefully dealt with.

It must be noted that the results reflected in the table 5 should not be taken as fixed and constant positions. Table 4. 6. reflects only one single picture of the members of the Kurdish ethnic category taken in a particular time and place. Thus, they need not be stable across time, space and persons. These positions may change over time. Ethnic individuals may shift from one form to another in response to structural, political or personal reasons. Yet, for some ethnic, members the form of ethnic identification that they adopt may become stable over time. In other words, some individuals may consistently adopt the same form of ethnic identification for a long period of time. For instance, between June 2015 and October 2015 elections the pro-Kurdish HDP lost around 2.5% votes, which means that these voters switched from politically active forms of ethnic identifications (form 1 and form 2) to politically passive forms (form 3 and form4).³⁹ This refers to the fact in less than six months the size of the Kurdish ethnic group significantly shrank.

I will now provide another picture of the relationship between Kurdish ethnic category and Kurdish ethnic group taken in November 2014. Of 2464 respondents, 14.89% (367) identified themselves as Kurds. The party preferences of the Kurds are as follows: HDP 42.51% (N=156), AKP 27.79% (N=102), undecided and others %29.07 (N=109). Compared the results

³⁹ Here I want to note that this does not mean that these voters are politically passive or have no identity-related political demands.

of the data from 2010, it is clear that the size of the Kurdish ethnic category significantly expanded. In 2010, only 26.7% of the members of the Kurdish ethnic category preferred to be members of the Kurdish ethnic group by adopting politically active forms ethnic identification (form 1 and form 2). The overwhelming majority (72.3%) preferred to adopt politically passive forms of ethnic identification (form 2 and form3). In 2010, 35.04% of self-identified Kurds stressed support for the pro-Kurdish political party, so that 35.04% percent of the self-identified Kurds constituted the members of the Kurdish ethnic group in the survey conducted in 2010. The survey data collected in 2014 refers to a significant increase in terms of the size of the Kurdish ethnic group: 42.51% of the Kurds preferred to be the members of the Kurdish ethnic category. It means that 57.49% of the self-identified Kurds, however, did not want to be part of the Kurdish ethnic group. As it is clear, switching between four forms of ethnic identification is theoretically and empirically possible.

Among those who stressed support for the pro-Kurdish political party, 75.51% have strong ethnic attachment while remaining 24.49% respondents have weak or no attachment to their ethnic backgrounds. This means that 75.51% of the Kurds who stressed support for the Kurdish political party adopted socially and political active ethnic identification and remaining 24.49% adopted socially passive but politically active ethnic identification. They together constituted the members of the Kurdish ethnic group in Turkey in November 2014.

Of the Kurds who expressed support for the non-ethnic political parties, 71.09% had strong ethnic attachment to their ethnic background and the rest (28.91%) stressed that they had weak or no ethnic attachment. In other words, 71.09% of the Kurds who stressed support for the non-ethnic political parties adopted socially active (strong attachment to ethnic identity) but politically passive ethnic identification (not supporting pro-Kurdish political party) and

remaining 28.91 % adopted socially and politically passive ethnic identity. Table 7 summarizes the distribution of the four forms of ethnic identification in 2014, based on the measures I discussed above.

		Socially Active	Socially Passive	Kurdish Ethnic Group N= 156 (42.50%)	Kurdish Ethnic Category, N= 367+?
Politically Active	Politically Passive	Form 1 N=110 (29.97%)	Form 2 N= 46 (12.53%)		
		Form 3 N=150 (40.87%)	Form 4 N=61 (16.62%)		

Table 4. 7. The distribution of the Kurds along four forms of ethnic identification in November, 2014. Since this survey only includes the self-identified Kurds, the actual size of the Kurdish ethnic category cannot be known.

Table 4. 6. and table 4. 7. clearly indicates how the members of the Kurdish ethnic category switched between different ethnic identification forms over the years. Of course, this does not mean that they constantly switch between these forms, some may consistently adopt the same form of ethnic identification over the years, some others may switch between these forms in response to structural, political, or personal reasons. For instance, the Ruling AKP has a strong support base among Kurdish voters despite the size of this support has changed over the years.

Expectations of the Model and Kurdish Empirical Reality

Now I will get into details about the relationship between ethnic identification forms and political and cultural expectations or demands. I propose that four forms of ethnic identification

are linked to certain political and cultural attitudes. For instance, *(H1) I hypothesize that those who adopt form 1 (politically and socially active Kurdish ethnic identification supporting Kurdish political parties) and form 2 (socially passive but politically active Kurdish ethnic identification also supporting Kurdish political parties), namely the members of the Kurdish ethnic group, are expected to be on the same page with ethnic political elites in terms of political and cultural demands.* I do expect that those who support ethnic political organizations are more likely to share the political and cultural demands Kurdish ethnic political elites struggle for.

Ethnic individuals who adopt form 3 (socially active but politically passive ethnic identification), however, constitute an empirical puzzle in ethnic settings where ethnic polarization and ethnic conflict are widespread and sharp. Although they have strong attachment to their ethnic background, these individuals do not translate their ethnic identity into political support for the pro-ethnic political organizations. Their strong ties with their ethnic background do not lead them to cooperate with ethnic political elites. Thus *(H2) I hypothesize that those who adopt socially active but politically passive ethnic identification form are more likely to support ethnic cultural demands but less likely to support political demands that ethnic political elites raise and promote.*

As for the ethnic members who adopt form 4 (politically and socially passive ethnic identification), *(H3) I hypothesize that those who adopt socially and politically passive ethnic identification form are less likely to support ethnic political and cultural demands that ethnic entrepreneurs raise and promote.*

As I illustrated above, there are two groups among these ethnic individuals. The first group rejects their ethnic background altogether and claim membership to the Turkish ethnic category. Here I want to mention an interesting informal conversation of mine with someone in

the field, a relatively old man I encountered during my field research in Istanbul. When I approached him to ask whether he might join my survey, he first started to question my research purposes. After I explained him that I aimed to measure identity perceptions of the Kurds in Turkey, he uttered very interesting ideas:

I am not an appropriate person for your study. I was a Kurds in the past, however it was long time ago. I left my Kurdishness behind. I am simply a Turk now. Do you know why? Because being a Kurd is costly. I enjoyed to be a Kurd in the past but things got ugly in this country. The PKK and its parties alienated me from Kurdishness. I am not a member of the Kurdish community anymore, so you should find “real Kurds” for your study.

When I asked him if ethnic identity change is really possible, he responded: “Yes, of course. Why not? It is all about how you feel yourself. Besides, our state and people (*devletimiz ve milletimiz*) have always embraced Kurds or members of other ethnic communities. Look, there are many Bosnians or Albanians living in this country and identifying as Turks. No one denies their Turkishness. So far, no one has contested my Turkishness either.”

As I illustrated in the analysis of the survey data collected in 2010, of 1926 respondents, 20.9% (403) who had right to claim membership to the Kurdish ethnic category (due to the parentage rule) identified as Turks like the old man I encountered in the field. Naturally, they are not expected to have any political or cultural demands for Kurdish ethnic category that stem from their sense of belonging. The second group identifies as Kurds but have weak or no attachment to their ethnic backgrounds. Thus, it would be logical to say that these people are less likely to support Kurdish ethnic political or cultural demands.

That being said, I now want to analyze data in order to show the relationship between ethnic identification forms, and political and cultural demands. To this end, I will designate some identifiable cultural and political demands that Kurdish political entrepreneurs in Turkey have

risen for over a quarter century. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Kurdish political parties have struggled for certain political demands since 1990s. Their major political demand is the constitutional recognition of the Kurdish identity. They, in a way, demand to be recognized as a separate ethnic group by the Turkish constitution. This is a major issue in the Kurdish problem in Turkey.

The survey data that I use in this study probed this issue in 2010. Answers given by those adopting politically active forms of ethnic identification (form 1 and form 2) and by those adopting politically passive forms of identification (form 3 and form 4) display a clear variance. For instance, overwhelming majority of the respondents in 2010 survey (92.1%) who adopted politically and socially active ethnic identification form (form1) expressed support for the constitutional recognition of the Kurdish identity as expected by my model. Only 1.36% of this category disagreed with the statement that the Kurdish identity must be recognized by the government. There is a similar situation in the case of those who adopted form 2. Of the respondents who adopted politically active but socially passive identification form (form 2), 91.25% expressed support for this political demand. Among these respondents no one disagreed with the statement above. Data indicate that those Kurds who preferred to be the members of the Kurdish ethnic group by adopting politically active ethnic identification forms (form1 and form2) were at the same page with the Kurdish political elites, as my conceptual model predicted. In other words, there is almost a complete match between the Kurdish political elites and the members of the Kurdish ethnic group in terms of political objectives. In other Words, the results confirm my first hypothesis.

Now let's look at the Kurds who preferred not to join the Kurdish ethnic group. Those who adopted socially active but politically passive form of ethnic identification (form 3)

displayed a different attitude on this issue. Approximately 53.7% of this category of Kurdish respondents supported the constitutional recognition of the Kurdish identity. This percentage indicates that nearly half of the respondents who adopted form 3 expressed support for the aforementioned political demand. Of these respondents, 24.93% disagreed with this political demand. The percentage of positive response for this category is much lesser than the first category (those who adopt politically active forms of ethnic identification). However, it is higher than I expected. As I stated previously, this form of ethnic identification is a blind spot in the study of ethnicity. When I went over the interviews I made with someone falling into this category I found an interesting note that can shed some light on this issue. My respondent who was a middle age lawyer working in Istanbul said:

to be honest, most of the demands that these Kurdish politicians raise are not bad and I can support those demands. But what makes me annoying about them is their leftist ideology. Whenever, I watch them speaking in the parliament or on TV, I cannot find myself in their speeches. The way they speak, the language they use are very foreign to me. Their speeches are loaded with leftist jargons. Due to my job, I occasionally spend time with the supporters of this party [pro-Kurdish HDP], even uneducated ones try to use these jargons. Thus, what they politically support or demand does not interest me at all even though they might be helpful for the Kurds.

As for the last ethnic identification form (form 4), while 41.52% of this category agreed with the statement. It means that the majority of this category do not support this political demand as expected by my model. Table 4. 8. indicates the results of the data.

		Socially Active				Socially Passive				Kurdish Ethnic Group	Kurdish Ethnic Category
Politically Active	Form 1				Form 2						
	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.	Answer	Freq.	Percent	Cum.			
	-----+				-----+						
	1	1	0.23	0.23	3	3	3.75	3.75			
	2	5	1.13	1.35	4	50	62.50	66.25			
3	18	4.06	5.42	5	23	28.75	95.00				
4	154	34.76	40.18	6	4	5.00	100.00				
5	254	57.34	97.52	-----+							
6	11	2.48	100.00	Total	80	100.00					
-----+											
Total	443	100.00									
Politically Passive	Form 3				Form 4						
	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.			
	-----+				-----+						
	1	36	4.77	4.77	1	39	9.87	9.87			
	2	152	20.16	24.93	2	105	26.58	36.46			
	3	138	18.30	43.24	3	81	20.51	56.96			
	4	305	40.45	83.69	4	132	33.42	90.38			
5	100	13.26	96.95	5	32	8.10	98.48				
6	23	3.05	100.00	6	6	1.52	100.00				
-----+				-----+							
Total	754	100.00			Total	395	100.00				

Table 4. 8. Kurdish identity must be constitutionally recognized: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree, (6) no response.

My interview respondents also differed on this matter. Those who support pro-Kurdish political parties point out that for an equal life with the Turkish people, the government should constitutionally recognize Kurds as a separate ethnic group. This is a clear fault line between the members of the Kurdish ethnic group and the Kurds who support non-ethnic political parties. Their major rationale behind this political demand was clearly articulated by one of my respondents who was a young woman working as a shopkeeper in Diyarbakir.

“we have been [referring to the Kurds who support the Kurdish political movements] long struggling for the constitutional recognition of the Kurdish identity... Without this recognition, the government will not treat us as equal citizens... They keep saying that we are brothers and sisters, ok then, if we are brothers and sisters we should be given our rights, and as a first step our

ethnic identity should be constitutionally recognized. Otherwise, this brotherhood discourse means nothing.”

I observed in the field that this view is highly shared by the supporters of the pro-Kurdish political party. They believe that if the recognition of the Kurdish identity is ensured it will accelerate and strengthen the integration of the Kurds into the Turkish society. “in order for the Kurds to feel secure and to develop a sense of belonging to the country, Kurdish identity must be constitutionally recognized by the government”

Another interview respondent, a woman in his 40s who was a real estate agent in Diyarbakır (the stronghold of the Kurdish ethnonationalist movement), expressed similar views:

They always claim that Turks and Kurds are like ‘flesh and nail’ [in Turkish this idiom refers to a very close relationship]. I think they [Turks] consider themselves as flesh and us [Kurds] as nails. When we started to ask about our rights, they thought that “nails” grew longer and got dirty, and attempted to cut the nails. We do not want to hear such words, because they do not solve our problems. We need to be recognized as a separate ethnic group that have equal rights with the Turks. Only then we feel secure and happy in this country.

On the other hand, those who adopt politically passive ethnic identification forms raise a different perspective that non-ethnic politicians in Turkey have long promoted. This view can be laid out as follows: “I do not understand why Kurdish politicians are pushing too much for the constitutional recognition of the Kurdish identity. If this happens, then Kurds would be legally given a minority status, which means to downgrade the status of the Kurds in this county. Kurds are not minority but the equal citizens of the country (interview).” On the other hand, some argue that

“constitutional recognition of the Kurdish identity can solve nothing but put Kurdish people under the tutelage of certain political parties or figures. I am pretty sure that if the government

gives this right to the Kurds, the HDP and the PKK will abuse it in a way that will work against the majority of the Kurds. (interview).”

Another significant political issue that pro-Kurdish politicians have risen is the high electoral threshold (10%) that was put in place in 1982 by the military regime of the time. Some argue that this 10% threshold functions as a significant obstacle for the pro-Kurdish political parties by discouraging Kurdish electorates from voting across ethnic lines. Kurdish politicians demand this high threshold either to be lowered or abolished altogether. Survey data from 2010 indicate that the overwhelming majority of the members of the Kurdish ethnic group agreed with the Kurdish political elites on this issue, as expected by my conceptual model. The overwhelming majority of those (82.62%) who adopted the first ethnic identification form agreed (36.34%) and/or strongly agreed (46.28%) the statement that electoral threshold should be abolished. Respondents who adopted the second ethnic identification form also overwhelmingly (86.25%) supported the aforementioned statement. It means that Kurdish political elites successfully put the members of the Kurdish ethnic group who adopted politically active forms of ethnic identification on the same page in terms of this political demand as well. However, respondents who adopted politically passive identification forms (form 3 and form 4) did not provide a strong support for this political demand. Only 39% of those who adopted form 3 and 37.44% of those who adopted form 4 expressed support for it. The majority of these respondents, either disagreed with or remained neutral to the statement that 10% electoral threshold should be abolished. Table 4. 9. provides the detailed results.

		Socially Active				Socially Passive					
Politically Active	Form 1				Form 2				Kurdish Ethnic Group	Kurdish Ethnic Category	
	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.	Soru55	Freq.	Percent	Cum.			
	-----+				-----+						
	1	7	1.58	1.58	1	1	1.25	1.25			
	2	18	4.06	5.64	2	5	6.25	7.50			
	3	42	9.48	15.12	3	3	3.75	11.25			
	4	161	36.34	51.47	4	47	58.75	70.00			
	5	205	46.28	97.74	5	22	27.50	97.50			
6	10	2.26	100.00	6	2	2.50	100.00				
-----+				-----+							
Total	443	100.00		Total	80	100.00					
Politically Passive	Form 3				Form 4						
	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.			
	-----+				-----+						
	1	45	5.97	5.97	1	35	8.86	8.86			
	2	199	26.39	32.36	2	125	31.65	40.51			
	3	188	24.93	57.29	3	82	20.76	61.27			
	4	224	29.71	87.00	4	108	27.34	88.61			
	5	73	9.68	96.68	5	40	10.13	98.73			
6	25	3.32	100.00	6	5	1.27	100.00				
-----+				-----+							
Total	754	100.00		Total	395	100.00					

Table 4. 9. Electoral threshold should be abolished: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree, (6) no response.

Now let's take a look at cultural demands. My conceptual framework expects that those who adopt politically active ethnic identification (form1 and form2) are more likely to support ethnic cultural demands. The survey data in 2010 asked respondents to express if they agree or disagree with following statement "the government should contribute to the improvement of Kurdish manners and customs." The members of the Kurdish ethnic group, who adopted politically active ethnic identification forms predominantly supported the statement. Of those adopting politically and socially active form of ethnic identification, 95.93% supported the statement. The overwhelming majority of the respondents who adopted form 2 (92.50%) also

expressed support for the contribution of the state to the improvement of the Kurdish manners and customs. This is something expected, or at least not a surprising result at all.

The Kurds who preferred not to join the Kurdish ethnic group led by Kurdish political elites displayed a similar attitude towards this issue as my model expected. The majority of the Kurds who adopted politically passive forms of ethnic identification (form 3 and form 4) expressed support for the statement that “the government should contribute to the improvement of Kurdish manners and customs.” Of those who adopted form 3, 76.93% agreed with the statement, and approximately 10% of this category picked negative choices (strongly disagree or disagree). Based on my field observations and interviews with those who adopt this form of ethnic identification, I can say that those who adopt politically passive forms of ethnic identification makes a clear distinction between the cultural and the political. One of my male interview respondents in Istanbul who was a taxi driver in his 50s voiced this distinction:

As a Kurd, I am proud of my ethnic background and culture. Kurdish culture is very rich and needs to be preserved and enriched. Our state (devletimiz) has a responsibility to preserve this beautiful culture. Indeed, the government [the AKP government] wants to contribute to the Kurdish culture but Kurdish politicians and the PKK do not let them do more reforms by agitating and provoking the process. We need to save Kurdish culture from political struggles. I don't think the Kurdish politicians help Kurdish culture at all by making it a side dish for their political interests.

As for those who adopted form 4 (socially and politically passive form of ethnic identification), 70.63% of this category expressed support for the statement as well. Approximately 16%, however, strongly disagreed or simply disagreed with the statement. The proportion of the positive answers provided by these two categories corresponds to a strong support for the state's role in enriching Kurdish cultural life. Thus, voting for non-ethnic political parties don't

necessarily make these Kurds give up on their ethnic cultural values/rights as my model expected. Table 4.10. shows the results for each identity forms.

Politically Active	Socially Active				Socially Passive				Kurdish Ethnic Group	Kurdish Ethnic Category
	Form 1				Form 2					
	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.		
	-----+-----				-----+-----					
	1	3	0.68	0.68	1	1	1.25	1.25		
	2	2	0.45	1.13	2	3	3.75	5.00		
	3	4	0.90	2.03	3	1	1.25	6.25		
	4	196	44.24	46.28	4	57	71.25	77.50		
	5	229	51.69	97.97	5	17	21.25	98.75		
	6	9	2.03	100.00	6	1	1.25	100.00		
-----+-----				-----+-----						
Total	443	100.00		Total	80	100.00				
Politically Passive	Form 3				Form 4					
	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.		
	-----+-----				-----+-----					
	1	12	1.59	1.59	1	7	1.77	1.77		
	2	63	8.36	9.95	2	56	14.18	15.95		
	3	83	11.01	20.95	3	50	12.66	28.61		
	4	440	58.36	79.31	4	244	61.77	90.38		
	5	140	18.57	97.88	5	35	8.86	99.24		
	6	16	2.12	100.00	6	3	0.76	100.00		
	-----+-----				-----+-----					
Total	754	100.00		Total	395	100.00				

Table 4. 10. The government should contribute to the improvement of Kurdish manners and customs: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree, (6) no response.

As a last point, I want to indicate a significant issue that can be seen as another indicator of groupness. Some scholars of social identity literature (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1982) claim that people tend to express themselves in terms of group membership instead of in terms of self. This means that there is a strong correlation between how we feel about ourselves and how we feel about the group. Thus, it is possible to infer from this argument that those who have strong sense of belonging to a group tend to link

their fate with that of their group. Or, those who have weak or no sense of belonging will be indifferent to the fate of the group. Do you have any ethnographic evidence in support of such assertions from your own research? That is, a causal link between affective and instrumental uses of identity by individuals! If true this could be an important issue for ethnic studies.

In the lights of social identity literature, I will analyze data about a related issue: The perceptions of the Kurds regarding the state's treatment of the Kurds indicate two different patterns. Needless to say, the Kurdish political elites (including politicians and intellectuals) in Turkey have argued since 1960s that the state treats Kurds as second class citizens (Aras, 2013; Bozarslan, 2005a; Heper, 2007; Somer, 2008; Watts, 2010; Yeğen, 2009), or as "Pseudo citizens" (Yeğen, 2009) compared to the Turks. This is a political position that all pro-Kurdish political parties have raised and promoted since 1990s when for the first time Kurdish political parties were allowed to run in the elections. Thus, it is a very well-known political opinion to the Kurds in Turkey. Before analyzing the data, I want to give some important background information here. As we discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, Turkish state does not recognize the Kurds as a group, meaning that it does not grant Kurds any group level rights. On the other hand, it welcomes Kurds as individuals, mostly without any problems stemmed from their ethnic backgrounds.

That being said, the survey questions asked in 2010 provide us with an opportunity to probe the issue that discussed above. Respondents were asked the following question: "can you live your identity freely?" Nearly half of the respondents who adopted form 1 (49.89%) picked the choice "absolutely no, there are legal barriers," 29.54% said that they (2.71%) either had peer pressure or they (24.83%) picked the choice "sometimes I feel some problems." This means that 74.72% of this category more or less feel problems in terms of living their identities, ranging

from legal barriers to peer or community pressure. Only 19.41% percent of this category stated that they could live their identities freely. Those who adopted form 2 displayed similar attitudes. One third of this category (31.25%) stated that they there were legal problems [such as?] in terms of living their identities, 38.75% expressed that they (5%) either had peer pressure or they (33.75%) sometimes felt some problems in living their identities. Overall, 70% of this category thought that they had problems in terms of living their identities, ranging from legal barriers to community pressure. Of those adopted this form of ethnic identification, 28.75% expressed that they could live their identities freely. Recall that these two categories constitute the members of the Kurdish ethnic group in Turkey according to my conception of the term.

My interviews with the Kurdish informants who fall into this category also corroborate this attitude. The striking point is that when they refer to the Kurds, or the problems they think the Kurds have, they generally use the pronoun “we,” something that other Kurds who support non-ethnic political parties very rarely use. One of my interviewees living in Istanbul said:

when we [Kurds] go to the public offices we face discrimination. For instance, they make you wait longer than it requires, or they reject to process your documents if a very minor part is missing. More importantly, they don’t show respect to you. They get rude if you ask for further information about your issues. I personally experienced similar problems many times.

I asked how they identify his ethnic background in a city like Istanbul where millions of people from different ethnic and cultural background live. He replied:

Many of the Kurds have an accent when they speak Turkish, so they easily understand that you are a Kurd. Second, many times you need to provide your identity card for the procedures in public offices. They can see where you are from. Of course, I don’t mean all public servants act this way, but many of them do.

Let's look at those who adopted politically passive forms of ethnic identification, the members of the Kurdish ethnic group according to my conception. Of those who adopted form 3, 70.42% expressed that they could live their identities freely without any major problems, by picking the choices "I can live, there is no problem" or "absolutely I can live, there is no problem at all." Only 7.96% of this category picked the choice "absolutely no, there are legal barriers." Twenty-eight percent picked either "I feel pressure from my peers (2.39%) or "sometimes I feel some problems" (24.83%). As for the respondents who adopted socially and politically passive form of ethnic identification, 69.11% stated that they could live their identities freely without any problems. Only 5.57% picked the choice "absolutely no, there are legal barriers." As for the other choices, 5.82% picked the choice "I feel pressure from my peers," and 16.71% expressed that they sometimes felt some problems in terms of their identities.

As a contribution to this point, I want to put a conversation that took place between me and one of my interviewees who was a member of the local branch of the ruling AKP. She was 27 years old and working for a private company in Istanbul. When I asked her if Kurds are discriminated against in Turkey as many of the supporters of the pro-Kurdish political parties believe, she said:

I don't agree with them. There are certain individuals who personally hate the Kurds and whenever they find an opportunity they show their hatreds. However, no one can claim that there is a widespread and systematic discrimination against the Kurds. I have never experienced any discrimination due to my ethnic background. I am a proud Kurd and always express my Kurdish identity. Besides, in all around the world, there are ultra-nationalists who hate other cultures or identities but what matters most is the practices of the state. In the past, the state involved in heavy human rights violations in the Kurdish populated regions against nationalist Kurds but now our party [AKP] has redressed all of those wrongdoings on the part of the state.

Unlike my previous informant who was a relatively old male and had an easily discernable eastern accent, she spoke Turkish without accent and her appearance never gave any clues about her ethnic identity. Thus, I asked her whether her physical appearance and proficiency of Turkish language positively affected her experience in Turkey. She replied that language proficiency or physical appearance had nothing to do with her experience. Her parents and many relatives, she claimed, with heavy eastern accents and psychical appearances that might indicate their Kurdish background never experienced any discrimination by the state either. However, the members of the Kurdish ethnic group contend that “the state has no issues with the Kurds who do not make their Kurdishness publicly and politically visible. Such Kurds are seen acceptable, perhaps desirable, by the state. However, if you assert your Kurdishness politically, you should expect discrimination or legal consequences by the state.”

Since those who adopt socially active and political passive form of ethnic identification (form 3) is an omitted category within the literature, it deserves more attention. Based on data I gathered through informal and in-depth interviews, I suggest that there are two different views among the Kurds who fall into this category in terms of the state’s treatment of the Kurds. The first view completely rejects presence of any discrimination against the Kurds. They think that “the state treats Kurds quite fairly and equally... They do not look at your ethnic background in job applications for public jobs. There are many Kurds who were appointed to significant public posts including the police department, the army and the judiciary.” According to them, Kurds enjoy all political and cultural rights without any problems.

The second view, however, admits the presence of certain degrees of discrimination against the Kurds yet their explanations of these discriminations indicate two different patterns. First, some tend to explain them with making a clear distinction between the state and the ruling

AKP. According to them, the state, referring to bureaucratic establishment, to some extent discriminate against the Kurds due to Kemalist and ultra-nationalist tendencies of this bureaucratic establishment, yet the ruling AKP has nothing to do with these instances of discrimination. According to them, the government is sincerely working to get rid of cultural or political discriminations against the Kurds. Second, they admit that the ruling AKP has restricted some political rights of the Kurds but it was necessary due to the fact that the Kurdish politicians badly abused all political reforms that the AKP government made. The government, in return, necessarily put some restrictions on some political rights. For instance, an informant who was a 29 years old man, said:

I cannot deny that there are some restrictions on the political rights of the Kurds. The government [the AKP government] had no option but to do this. After the government's "the Kurdish opening," the supporters of the HDP exaggerated the rights given to the Kurds, they provoked Turkish nationalist groups in a way that has weakened the government's hand in the process of Kurdish opening.

I asked if he gave few examples of how the supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP abused the rights given to the Kurds, he replied:

For instance, they many times took to the streets to protest the government's policies towards the Kurds in Syria. They were expected to do so peacefully but instead they damaged cars in the streets, set them on fire, attacked policemen, broke the windows of the shops. They abused the tolerance of the security forces but later the government did not tolerate these violent demonstrations and severely punished those who were responsible. Now whenever they want to organize rallies for demonstrations the government does not allow. This is just one example.

As it is clear from the data the members of the Kurdish ethnic group differ from the Kurds who prefer not to join Kurdish ethnic group. Almost 70% of the members of the Kurdish ethnic group

expressed that there were legal or other problems in terms of living their identities. It shows that they are on the same page with the Kurdish political elites on this issue as well. On the other hand, almost 70 percent of those who adopted politically passive forms of ethnic identification (form3 and form4) expressed that they could live their identities without any problems. There are two different patterns here. If we recall the argument made by social identity approaches, it is possible to claim that those who adopt politically active forms of ethnic identification (form 1 and form 2) define themselves in terms of group membership. They feel problems in terms of their identities because the Turkish state denies Kurds group rights such as constitutional recognition as a group or political autonomy. However, at the individual level, Turkey incorporates ethnic Kurds. This explains why 70% of those who adopted form 3 and form 4 stated that they could live their identities freely. They simply do not care about whether the state grants group level rights or not. Table 4.11. presents the detailed results of the data.

		Socially Active				Socially Passive				Kurdish Ethnic Group	Kurdish Ethnic Category
Politically Active	Form 1				Form 2						
	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.			
	-----+				-----+						
	1	221	49.89	49.89	1	25	31.25	31.25			
	2	12	2.71	52.60	2	4	5.00	36.25			
	3	110	24.83	77.43	3	27	33.75	70.00			
	4	59	13.32	90.74	4	16	20.00	90.00			
	5	27	6.09	96.84	5	7	8.75	98.75			
6	14	3.16	100.00	6	1	1.25	100.00				
-----+				-----+							
Total	443	100.00		Total	80	100.00					
Politically Passive	Form 3				Form 4						
	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.	Answers	Freq.	Percent	Cum.			
	-----+				-----+						
	1	60	7.96	7.96	1	22	5.57	5.57			
	2	18	2.39	10.34	2	23	5.82	11.39			
	3	112	14.85	25.20	3	66	16.71	28.10			
	4	263	34.88	60.08	4	134	33.92	62.03			
	5	268	35.54	95.62	5	139	35.19	97.22			
6	33	4.38	100.00	6	11	2.78	100.00				
-----+				-----+							
Total	754	100.00		Total	395	100.00					

Table 4.11. Can you live your identities freely? (1) Absolutely no, there are legal barriers, (2) I feel pressure from my community/neighborhood/peer pressure, (3) Sometimes I feel some problems, (4) I can live, there is no problem, (5) Absolutely I can live, there is no problem at all, (6) no response.

Conclusion

The survey evidence presented here confirms the usefulness of the conceptual framework I developed in the first chapter. This conceptual framework helps us explore some blind spots in the study of ethnicity. First, survey evidence illustrates that ethnic category and ethnic group refers to different phenomena in the real/empirical world. Being a member of the Kurdish ethnic category does not refer to a necessary membership to the Kurdish ethnic group. To this end, I documented that Kurdish ethnic group is a subset of Kurdish ethnic category in terms of the composition of the members. In other words, the members of the Kurdish ethnic group are at the

same time the members of the Kurdish ethnic category. Yet, the members of the Kurdish ethnic category are not necessarily the members of the Kurdish ethnic group. Survey evidence from two different times also confirms that ethnic members may shift from one form of ethnic identification to another across time, meaning that ethnic group membership is not stable and fixed across time and space. Survey data also shows that a significant portion of the Kurds do not support pro-Kurdish political party. In other words, a significant number of the Kurds adopt either socially active and politically passive ethnic identification (form 3) or socially and politically passive form of ethnic identification (form 4). Especially, those who adopt form 3 refers to a blind spot or an empirical puzzle, a carefully examination of which can be conducive to nuanced theoretical and conceptual innovations in the study of ethnicity.

My conceptual model also indicates that differential treatment of the Kurds who adopt different ethnic identification forms is quite important in order to recognize some significant issues on the ground. For instance, I showed that those who adopt form 3 support non-ethnic political parties (predominantly ruling AKP) not because they have low attachment to their ethnic backgrounds or have no political and cultural demands. On the contrary, they have strong ethnic attachment as well as political and cultural demands. Studies on the Kurdish issue in Turkey, however, generally ignore these Kurds, focusing only on the Kurds who adopt politically active forms of ethnic identification, namely the members of the Kurdish ethnic group. Studying the motives of these ethnic Kurds can yield significant theoretical and conceptual innovations.

In this chapter, I also indicated that voting for pro-ethnic political parties is a useful indicator for measuring ethnic group membership, at least for the Kurds in Turkey. Brubaker argues that voting for a pro-ethnic party does not put someone on the same page with ethnic political entrepreneurs in terms of political and cultural demands. Yes, it is true that there is no a

complete match between ethnic political elites and their supporters in terms of political and cultural demands. However, I demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of the Kurds who support pro-Kurdish political party go along well with the Kurdish political elites in terms of various political and cultural demands, something that refers to groupness. Thus, voting for pro-ethnic political parties works as a useful measure for ethnic group membership.

As a last point, from the analysis provided in this chapter, a couple of questions can be derived for future studies. First, why do a significant number of the Kurds in Turkey support the ruling AKP while there exists a pro-Kurdish political party struggling for political and cultural rights for the Kurds? Why do some Kurds adopt politically active forms of ethnic identification but others don't? What are the motives behind adopting politically passive forms of Kurdish identity despite the presence of encouraging factors?

Chapter 5 –Ethnicity, Religion and Politics: Secular and Non-Secular Ethnic Identity Perceptions

In the first chapter, I developed a conceptual model based on the distinction between the terms ethnic category and ethnic group, and proposed that the reflection of an ethnic identity in the political and social domains may take four forms in terms of the way ethnic category members perform their ethnic identities, which are (1) socially and politically active, (2) socially passive and politically active, (3) socially active and politically passive, (4) socially and politically passive. Then, in the second and third chapters I applied this conceptual framework to the Kurdish case in Turkey and indicated that a significant portion of the Kurdish population in Turkey adopt politically passive forms of ethnic identification (that is form 3 and form 4). The application of the conceptual model to the Kurdish case reveals an empirical puzzle in the sense that despite the presence of some triggering factors –i.e., violence, high polarization, economic deprivation, a significant portion of the Kurds do not translate their ethnic identities in the political domain.

Previous work on the Kurdish issue in Turkey has generally paid attention to the historical underpinnings and the growth of Kurdish nationalism (ethnic group formation). As a result, these studies exclusively focus on those Kurds who embrace nationalist sentiments and rally around ethnic nationalist organizations, including the PKK, Kurdish civil society organizations, and Kurdish political parties (Aras, 2013; McDowall, 1996; Özcan, 2006; Romano, 2006b; Watts, 2010), while ignoring the fact that a significant number of Kurds prefer to abstain from nationalist Kurdish organizations. In other words, they mainly deal with the perceptions and demands of the members of the Kurdish ethnic group.

To be sure, the fact that a significant portion of the Kurds prefer non-ethnic political parties (predominantly the ruling AKP) to pro-Kurdish political parties is a familiar issue in

Turkish intellectual landscape. Although it has not been subjected to adequate theoretical and conceptual analysis, some explanations have been proposed by journalists, academics, and political pundits. The first explanation puts emphasis on the role of ideological factors in shaping Kurdish political behavior. The underlying logic of the argument is that secular (leftist) political ideology of pro-Kurdish political parties alienates pious segments of the Kurds and push them towards the ruling AKP, which extensively employs religious discourses and themes in its election campaigns. This argument is the most common explanation in Turkish intellectual circles, such that Turkish political pundits use the term “pious Kurds” when they refer to the Kurds who support the ruling AKP. The second explanation pays attention to material factors to explain this puzzling political behavior. The Kurds who vote for the non-ethnic political parties, the argument goes, do this in return for material benefits (Arıkan Akdağ, 2015). In other words, this explanation holds that the main motive in supporting the AKP is to get access to material benefits and power centers. This explanation is widely held by the Kurds who support the pro-Kurdish political parties. My informants who support Kurdish political organizations also raised this argument in order to explain the Kurdish support for the ruling AKP. While the first explanation emphasizes ideological incentives, the second one points to material incentives in explaining the support for the AKP. One can raise a third explanation by arguing that due to the structural and legal limits imposed by the Turkish state (such as higher electoral thresholds, lack of adequate financial resources for the pro-Kurdish parties during electoral campaigns) pro-Kurdish political parties cannot win the votes they deserve.

All of these factors, more or less, might be playing a role in the puzzling Kurdish political behavior in Turkey. My objective in this study, however, is not to find out which one of these factors has more explanatory power. I will, instead, focus on another significant issue. As I

mentioned above, the most common and widely shared argument puts emphasis on ideological factors. This line of argument suggests that religiosity is a decisive factor in shaping political behaviors of the Kurds who support the ruling AKP. Indeed, survey data from 2010 (92.21%) and 2015 (91.38%) verify that the Kurdish constituents who support the JDP are predominantly pious people. However, although religiosity appears to be a strong factor in explaining the support for the ruling JDP, it is also true that pro-Kurdish BDP is quite successful in garnering the support of the pious Kurds as well. Survey data indicate that 65.95% (2010) and 70% (2015) of the respondents who expressed support for the pro-Kurdish BDP were pious. While the pro-Kurdish BDP's support base includes religious and non-religious Kurds, the ruling AKP has a strong appeal only among the religious Kurds. Why is this a case? Are there any identifiable and significant differences between the Kurds who support pro-Kurdish political parties and those who support non-ethnic parties in terms of their perceptions of ethnic identity? What differentiates the religious Kurds who are divided between the pro-Kurdish BDP and the ruling AKP?

In this chapter, I aim to address these significant questions. The Kurdish case in Turkey tells us some significant yet neglected things regarding how ethnic category members make sense of their ethnic identities. I set out to propose a contingent theoretical framework that aims to explicate the relationship between ethnicity and religion in Muslim societies that I believe does not only shed lights on the interaction between ethnicity and religion in the Kurdish case in Turkey, but also on how ethnicity and religion interact in Muslim majority societies in general. As I noted before, I do not propose a theory of ethnic voting behavior. Nor do I explain the dynamics of Kurdish voting behavior in Turkey. Instead, I will show that the political behaviors of the Kurds in Turkey provide us with an opportunity to explore how ethnicity and religion

interact in relation to political behavior. Thus, I theorize about the nexus between ethnic identity and religion, and how it may affect ethnic group formation and the reactions of ethnic category members to emerging ethnic groups in Muslim societies.

I depart from the proposition that ethnic category members do not perceive ethnic identity homogenously, especially in terms of the cultural content of their ethnic identities (Abdelal et al., 2006). Ethnic identity might mean different things to ethnic category members. This has broader implications in the empirical domain, yet I will deal only with one dimension, that is, how ethnic members relate to ethnic identity in tandem with religion and how this perception produces different modalities of ethnic identity and under some conditions, may affect political behavior. I basically argue that ethnic category members in Muslim societies perceive ethnic identity in relation to religion in two ways. First, some members adopt, what I call, a *secular ethnic identity*, which dissociates religion from the cultural content of ethnic identity. Secular ethnic identity rejects religion as a constitutive element of ethnic identity and defines ethnic identity on the basis of non-religious cultural elements such as language, myth of common origin or tribal ties. In this understanding, ethnic identity has no spiritual or religious connotations in the minds of those who adopt this type of ethnic identity. Second, some other ethnic category members may adopt, what I call, a *non-secular ethnic identity*, which strongly associates religion with ethnic identity, a form of ethnic identity that views religion as an inextricable component of ethnic identity together with other non-religious cultural elements, including language, tribal identity and myth of common origin. In this modality, ethnic identity gains sacred meanings in the eyes of those who adopt it. I argue that these two understandings play significant roles in ethnic group formation and, under some conditions, may shape reactions of ethnic members to emerging ethnic groups in Muslim societies.

The formation of ethnic categories and ethnic groups

In the first three chapters, following Brubaker (2002), I theoretically and empirically indicated that the terms ethnic category and ethnic group refer to different phenomena and suggested that ethnic groups are subsets of ethnic categories in terms of the compositions of ethnic members. I also examined the role and strategies of ethnic political elites in the construction of ethnic groups out of ethnic categories yet did not deal with the micro dynamics of ethnic group formation. By micro dynamics I mean how cultural contents of ethnic categories are constructed and how ethnic entrepreneurs strategically propose and define an ethnic identity based on certain cultural attributes that they pick from the cultural content of ethnic category. Ethnic group is a subset of ethnic category not just in terms of the composition of members but in terms of defining cultural content as well.

Primordial school of ethnicity assumes that ethnic individuals or members of ethnic categories perceive ethnic identity homogenously, that is, ethnic identity means exactly the same thing to the members of a particular ethnic category. This approach rules out or ignore subjective conditions of individuals –i.e., personality traits, intellectual capacity, value systems or worldviews. Recent constructivist and instrumentalist scholarship, however, indicates that members of an ethnic category may conceive of their ethnic identities in different ways with different meanings (Abdelal et al., 2006; Dawson, 2009). Simply put, ethnic identity may have different meanings for different individuals. This is a significant theoretical insight on which I will build on my argument.

By multiple meanings of ethnic identity, I do not mean the level of ethnic attachment. Regardless of the magnitude of their attachments, ethnic category members may have particular and variable perceptions of their ethnic identities in terms of the defining cultural attributes. In

this section I will argue that all ethnic categories have a cultural content that includes multiple cultural attributes, and that is constructed by the everyday practices of the category members (Fearon & Laitin, 2010). Moreover, ethnic political entrepreneurs construct ethnic groups out of ethnic categories on the basis of a proposed understanding of ethnic identity. Ethnic elites may pick certain cultural attributes from the cultural content of ethnic category and rule out others while defining their understanding of ethnic identity. In order to make my arguments more explicit, I will conjure up two foundational concepts that I discussed and conceptualized in the first three chapters. The conceptual distinction between ethnic category and ethnic group made by Brubaker (2002) is of vital importance in order to understand the dynamics and processes of ethnic group formation and how individuals conceive of their identities. Thus, these two concepts will again structure my arguments in this chapter.

All ethnic categories have a cultural content that may include various attributes including language, faith, traditions, certain dressing codes, tribal ties, values and so forth. Everyday practices of ordinary members produce cultural content of an ethnic category (Fearon & Laitin, 2010). Members collectively construct the cultural attributes of their ethnic category through socialization that is beginning shortly after birth. In this sense, it is not necessarily a conscious process of identity construction. In Bourdieu's (1990) words, this refers to *doxa* or *doxic* experience, which Jenkins (1992) summarizes as follows:

Ethnic members are an integral part of their present circumstances. Within them they have grown up, learning and acquiring a set of practical cultural competences, including a social identity – 'the sense of the position one occupies in social space' – which renders them largely incapable of perceiving social reality, in all of its arbitrariness, as anything other than 'the way things are,' necessary to their own existence as who they are. Most people, most of the time, take themselves

and their social world somewhat for granted: They do not think about it because they do not have to (p. 70).

The main objective here is not to construct an ethnic category, yet it is a natural process of being socialized to a particular culture or ethnic category. All individuals, in this sense, are products as well as makers of the cultural habitat they live in. They are product of their cultural milieu in the sense that the cultural environment they live in, more or less, shapes and reshapes their worldviews, life styles, family relations, and tribal ties, if any. On the other hand, they are makers of their cultural environment as well because they actively contribute to the construction and reconstruction of these cultural attributes by patterning and acting out them in their everyday life. Thus, it is possible to claim that cultural attributes of an ethnic category come into existence and endure through the collective practices of the members.

Note that I do not reduce cultural content of an ethnic category to a single attribute. Instead, the everyday practices of ethnic category members in the historical process produce a set of cultural attributes –i.e., language, faith, tribal loyalties, dress codes, myth of common origin. One of these attributes might become the most distinguishing and peculiar characteristic of an ethnic category, yet this does not change the reality that cultural contents of ethnic categories include multiple cultural elements. For instance, as I discussed in the second chapter, several anthropological studies put emphasis on a list of attributes in their accounts of Kurdish ethnic category. These attributes are Kurdish language with different accents, Islamic faith with multiple sects, and tribal ties, among which language is the most distinctive cultural feature that separates Kurdish ethnic category from other ethnic categories such as Turkish, Arabic, and Persian. However, faith and tribal features are also part of the cultural content of the Kurdish ethnic category. This is, of course, not to say that ethnic category members assign the same value to these attributes. I will return this point later in this section.

Although individual members collectively construct an ethnic category with their everyday practices, they individually identify with the category through different cultural attributes that are already present in the content of the ethnic category. Every single individual ethnic member develops a sense of ethnic identity based on available cultural attributes. The question of what cultural attributes are the defining elements of a particular ethnic identity may result in different answers for the category members. While some may define their particular understanding of ethnic identity based on the most distinctive cultural attributes, some others may add some other cultural attributes to these distinctive elements in their understanding of identity. This is to say that the cultural content of an ethnic identity adopted and practiced by an individual member is a subset of the cultural content of an ethnic category. It is possible that two ordinary members of an ethnic category may define their ethnic identities in different ways in terms of defining cultural attributes (Abdelal et al., 2006; Schildkraut, 2014).

For instance, assume that A is a hypothetical ethnic category that has been constructed in the historical process by the everyday practices of its members. The cultural content of the ethnic category A has four particular cultural attributes: x, y, z, and t. Thus, the cultural content of category A is to be as follows $A = \{x, y, z, t\}$. One of these attributes may be the most distinctive cultural characteristic of the ethnic category. In our hypothetical case, suppose that it is the attribute x that culturally separates the category A from other ethnic categories. The other attributes in the cultural content may be in common with some other ethnic categories. Members of the category A collectively involve in the construction of this cultural content. However, it does not mean that these members define their ethnic identity in the same way with the same cultural attributes (Abdelal et al., 2006; Watts, 2010). Their understanding of ethnic identity may vary in terms of what cultural attributes are to be constituent elements of their ethnic identity.

This is a significant point for the theoretical propositions I will develop in this chapter. Thus, I want to elaborate more on this issue.

In our running hypothetical example, there are eight possible subsets of the cultural content of the ethnic category A. Since x is the distinguishing cultural attribute of the ethnic category, it has to be present in all subsets. The possible subsets of the cultural content of the ethnic category A are, thus, as follows: {x}, {x, y}, {x, z}, {x, t}, {x, y, z}, {x, y, t}, {x, t, z}, and {x, y, z, t}. These are theoretically possible perceptions of ethnic identity (in terms of defining attributes) that the members of the ethnic category A may adopt. For instance, some may only define their ethnic identity with the attribute x, some other with x and z, still others with x, y and t. In other words, the cultural content of ethnic categories function like a cultural repertoire or toolkit from which individual members pick up certain attributes to define their ethnic identities. Some attributes may have more value than others for members in terms of the meaning of ethnic identity. These are theoretical possibilities and need not necessarily be the case in the phenomenal world.

I want to add a caveat here. Ethnic members develop a particular sense of identity through socialization. Parents, siblings, relatives, friends and some other people may affect each other in developing a sense of ethnic identity. This process does not necessitate a mindful effort on the part of individuals. They may or may not deliberate on the meaning of their ethnic identities. However, all ethnic category members in one way or another develop a “cognitive scheme” regarding the meaning of their identities. “Individuals do not simply play a role designed by society, but internalize a matrix that is gradually built up from within their own *Lebenswelt* (or life-world) by means of learning process” (Wimmer, 2002, p. 21). Wimmer (2002, p. 32) defines this as “internalized culture form” or “habitual dispositions.” When applied

to the field of ethnicity, I call this as *internalized ethnic identity perception*. These internalized perceptions may turn into a field of contestation when some ethnic entrepreneurs emerge to mobilize members of a particular ethnic category for certain political objectives. I return to this significant point in the next section.

My second foundational concept is ethnic group, which, in my conception, refers to a coherent group of people who come together for a political purpose (ranging from independence to political autonomy) on the basis of a more or less homogenously perceived corporate ethnic identity derived from an ethnic category. Thus, the terms ethnic category and ethnic group refer to distinct phenomena as theoretically and empirically shown in the first three chapters. As I underscored in the first chapter, successfully formed ethnic groups are more likely to put their members on the same page in terms of the meaning of the ethnic identity and political goals.

When some ethnic political entrepreneurs attempt to mobilize members of an ethnic category in order to form an ethnic group, they generally tend to propose or impose a particular understanding of ethnic identity based on certain cultural attributes that are already present in the cultural content of the ethnic category as I made it clear above hypothetical example. In a way, ethnic political entrepreneurs offer their own perception of ethnic identity based on certain cultural attributes they pick from the cultural content of the ethnic category as the ideal or necessary type and try to put the members of the ethnic category on the same page in terms of the meaning of the ethnic identity they construct. I assume that this is a significant and, under some conditions, a necessary step. Before convincing ethnic members to politically act towards certain objectives, ethnic political elites attempt to construct a particular understanding of ethnic identity with certain defining cultural attributes and try to get this particular perception accepted by the ethnic masses.

As Keyes (1981) astutely remarks, “However formulated and presented, the symbols [cultural attributes] of ethnic identity must be appropriated and internalized by individuals before they can serve as the basis for orienting people to social [or political] action” (p. 9). A particular perception of ethnic identity, in other words, if becomes successful, establishes a well-functioning channel of communication among the members, something that makes it easy for ethnic entrepreneurs to lead or encourage people for action, social or political. Thus, as some ethnic entrepreneurs come up to mobilize members of an ethnic category for certain political purposes, that is forming an ethnic group out of an ethnic category, they, in a way, initiate a negotiation process regarding meaning of ethnic identity.

Compromising or Contesting the Meaning of Ethnic Identity

In order to explain the nature of this negotiation process, I will draw on Wimmer’s (2002) approach explaining the processes and dynamics of nation and nation-state building. He proposes two foundational concepts. The first concept is “cultural compromise,” which refers to a process of negotiating meaning of a culture, taking place between elites and different segments of a society. Wimmer (2002) defines this process as follows:

A cultural compromise emerges when the actors sharing a communicative space can agree that certain values are valuable and that certain modes of classifying the social world make sense. Such a process of negotiating meaning does not depend on a convergence of interests, since even from different positions in economic, political and cultural hierarchies, individuals may find – albeit for different reasons – a certain way of looking at the world meaningful. This consent clearly does not take place in the neat and clean world of rational decision-making where all lines cross at a point of enlightened harmony, but is based on already established and internalized modes of meaning-making, a certain habitus in Bourdieu’s words. Indeed, a cultural compromise

has no life of its own and exists only in its manifold interpretations and variations, nourished and colored by the specific experiences and social positions of individual actors (p. 8.).

According to Wimmer (2002), this compromise takes place in three levels. In his words:

I have distinguished here between three closely related aspects of culture. Internalized culture forms the starting point for the negotiation of meaning; it is composed of a system of habitual dispositions, or mental schemes. This is culture on the individual and cognitive level. On the collective and symbolic level, notions about the set-up and workings of society, on what is just and unjust, sacred and profane, are negotiated. Such cultural compromise is achieved if all actors relating to one another in an arena can formulate aspects of their long-term interests in a shared symbolic language. Finally, as a consequence of this compromise, certain cultural markers are singled out in order to reveal and reinforce the distinction between insiders and outsiders – between those partaking in the basic compromise and those remaining on the margins (p. 32).⁴⁰

Individuals take part in this negotiation process with their “internalized culture forms,” which Wimmer describes this initial phase as “individual and cognitive level.” In other words, individuals through socialization within a cultural environment develop “mental schemes” regarding the culture, in which they live, something that helps them make sense of or take active positions in the negotiation process. This, in a way, gives individuals agency, making them active participants instead of being passive recipients. In the second phase, participants–i.e., elites, different groups and individuals in a society, seek a cultural compromise on certain cultural symbols such as dress styles, faith or modes of speaking. This takes place on “collective and symbolic level,” which may require individuals to make concessions in terms of their individual understandings of culture or “internalized culture forms” in order to reach a collective

⁴⁰ Abdelal and colleagues (2006, p.696) propose a similar framework that refers to two dimensions of collective identities. The first dimension is content that “focuses on the meaning ascribed to an identity” (norms, social purposes, relational comparisons, and cognitive models). The second dimension is contestations that “refers to the degree of agreement within a group over the content of the shared category.”

understanding of the culture negotiated. Once a compromise is achieved, according to Wimmer, in the last phase certain cultural markers are chosen as the defining elements of a culture that demarcates between insiders (us) and outsiders (them). This last level refers to, what Wimmer calls, “social closure” that is the second foundational concept in Wimmer’s argument and that can “lead to ethnic groups, nations, social classes, village communities and so on.” (Wimmer, 2002, p. 8).⁴¹

Wimmer (2002) defines nationalism as the highest form of cultural compromise of modern society and nation-states as the highest form of social closure that emerges from “the consolidation and general acceptance of this compromise” (p. 52). Note that in Wimmer’s analysis cultural compromise does not refer to a fixed and stable situation, instead it has a precarious nature. “Whenever the balance of power shifts, conflictive processes of negotiating meaning are unleashed, and new cultural arrangements are to be found. Furthermore, individuals can also travel in this landscape, because they are able to distance themselves from their own cultural inculcation and can reinterpret it in a creative way” (Wimmer, 2002, p. 41). Thus, cultural compromise is always in the making. In this sense, cultural compromise does not imply a cultural homogeneity or a notion of culture as a “complex and integrated whole.” It simply singles out cultural markers that separates insiders (us) from outsiders (them), otherwise it does not eliminate intra-cultural variation (Wimmer, 2002, p. 22). In other words, culture includes competing voices (Geertz, 1973). It is important to note that the process of cultural compromise requires consents of the participants. Thus, a cultural compromise cannot be achieved in

⁴¹ “The theory of compromise, on the other hand, is not based on the idea of an original state of mankind or on the notion of pre-cultural rationality. Cultural compromise is based on consenting to a social order from different positions of interests, without implying that this order could be based on formal reasoning. On the contrary, individuals eventually consent by weighing different, not universal, interests: their evaluations are not based on abstract standards of rationality, but on habitualised schemes that are grounded in the experience of social and cultural givens.” (Wimmer, 2002, p. 31).

authoritarian contexts where the powerful imposes his understanding on the weak. In such settings, the weak generally seems to admit this imposed understanding in public so that a negotiating process does not take place (Wimmer, 2002, p. 38).

By drawing on Wimmer's perspective, I suggest that presence of an ethnic category in a cultural setting, in itself, does not necessitate a process of cultural compromise. In contexts where ethnic categories are not politicized, ethnic category members do not need to initiate a collective process of negotiating meaning of their ethnic identity. They, to be sure, individually think about or may define the characteristics or the nature of their ethnic identities, but this endeavor does not take on a collective quality. In such contexts, they usually do not talk much about their ethnic identities in their everyday life. In other words, they do not develop a sense of groupness that requires them to contemplate on the meaning of their ethnic identities. Individuals develop and retain their internalized ethnic identity perceptions, yet do not communicate their particular internalized perceptions with one another on the collective and symbolic level.

However, in contexts where ethnic identities are politicized, there emerges a process of negotiating meaning of their ethnic identity. When ethnic political elites, in such a setting, attempt to form an ethnic group out of an ethnic category for achieving certain political objectives, they, in fact, initiate a process of cultural compromise regarding the meaning of ethnic identity. The politicization of ethnicity leads ethnic members to engage in a process of negotiating meaning, a process that aim to single out certain cultural markers or attributes from the cultural content of ethnic category that clearly separates in-groups from out-groups. This negotiation occurs on collective and symbolic level. Individuals participate in the process of negotiating meaning with their own internalized ethnic identity perceptions. Although it is ethnic entrepreneurs that trigger/initiate and lead this process of negotiating meaning, individual

participants are not passive receivers but agentic actors who also force ethnic elites to make concessions to reach a cultural compromise.

For instance, Posner's (2004) work on the Chewa and Timbuka ethnic categories by the border between Zambia and Malawi shows my point clearly. "While the objective cultural differences between Chewas and Timbukas on both sides of the border are identical, the political salience of the division between these communities is altogether different" (Posner, 2004, p. 529). Posner documents that both ethnic identities are politically salient in Malawi but non-salient in Zambia. In my conception, there are Chewa and Timbuka ethnic groups (emerged from Chewa and Timbuka ethnic categories) in Malawi but not in Zambia. Posner explains this variation with the sizes of both groups in that Chewa and Timbuka ethnic categories are large enough to create viable political forces in Malawi. What matters for my point here is that "when asked what makes Chewas and Timbukas different from one another, most Zambian members of these communities will tell you 'we are the same'" (Posner, 2004, p. 531). However, the picture is very different in Malawi, because differences between both ethnic categories are very salient in the minds of members. This, however, does not mean that the members of Timbuka and Chewa ethnic categories in Zambia are unaware of objective differences between their respective ethnic categories. Rather, it means that they simply do not think of their ethnic identities in collective terms. Thus, there are no Timbuka and Chewa ethnic groups in Zambia.

Congruity and Incongruity Between the Cultural Contents of Ethnic Category and Ethnic Group

Here I want to offer an analytical framework that will help us better understand the nexus between ethnic category and ethnic group in terms of their cultural contents. As I discussed above, different perceptions of a particular ethnic identity may emerge from a particular ethnic

category in terms of defining cultural attributes. Recall the running hypothetical example, the cultural content of ethnic category A is {x, y, z, t}, from which the following perceptions of ethnic identity with particular defining attributes may theoretically emerge: {x}, {x, y}, {x, z}, {x, t}, {x, y, z}, {x, y, t}, {x, t, z}, and {x, y, z, t}. When ethnic political entrepreneurs embark on to form an ethnic group out an ethnic category for certain political objectives they tend to produce and promote a particular perception of ethnic identity with a particular cultural content that they pick from the cultural content of the ethnic category. In our example, each of these eight subsets of the cultural content of ethnic category A represents a possible perception of ethnic identity that ethnic political elites may choose. Thus, “An individual may be faced with several alternative versions of the same identity from which he or she must chose” (Keyes, 1981).

There are many empirical cases indicating how incongruent ethnic identities may emerge from the same ethnic category. For instance, consider Kurdish ethnic category in Iraq. Its cultural content contains Sunni Islam, Shia Islam, the Sorani dialect, the Kurmanji dialect, and tribes, which have been constructed by the everyday practices of ordinary Kurds. While the members of the Barzani family, as political entrepreneurs, define and construct a Kurdish ethnic identity based on the Kurmanji dialect and tribal identity (Morad 1992, 121), Jalal Talabani and his close associates construct a Kurdish identity based on the Sorani dialect and rule out tribal identities and religious affiliations (Gunter 1992; Bruinessen 1992). As a third group, the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) promotes the idea that Islam is an inextricable component of Kurdish identity and without Islamic component Kurdish identity will lose its meaning (Kilic, 2006). In this sense, three different Kurdish identities have emerged and been politicized in Iraq.

The Kurdish ethnic category in Iran also paves the way for different ethnic identifications. The cultural content of the Kurdish ethnic category in Iran includes Shia Islam, Sunni Islam, Kurmanji and Sorani dialects. Sunni and Shia Kurds have two different understandings of Kurdish ethnic identity (Entessar 1984; Bruinessen 1992). Sunni Kurds view Sunni Islam as a strong component of Kurdishness but Shia Kurds replace Sunni sect with Shia sect in their definition of Kurdishness. Similarly, the Turkish ethnic category in Turkey includes the Turkish language, the myth of a common ancestry, and Islam. In this case too, two different understandings of what it means to be a Turk emerged. Secular Turks view the Turkish language and the common history as the only reference points for Turkish identity (*Türk ulusalcılığı*) (Neyzi, 2002), while many other Turks believe that Islam is an equal, or perhaps even the most important, component of Turkish identity (*Türk milliyetçiliği*) (Çetinsaya, 1999). In addition to this, Schatz (2004) denotes that regional and clan differences in Kazakhstan result in different conceptions of Kazakh identity.

At this point, two theoretical possibilities emerge. First, ethnic political elites may pick all cultural attributes that are present in the cultural content of ethnic identity as the defining cultural attributes of the ethnic group they aim to construct. In this scenario, there arises a complete overlap between ethnic category and ethnic group in terms of cultural content. Ethnic entrepreneurs, in other words, do not rule out any cultural attributes present in the cultural content of the ethnic category that are constructed by the *doxic* practices or experiences of ethnic members. They, instead, embrace them all, based on which they aim to construct an ethnic group. In this situation, the cultural content of the ethnic group A' would be the same with the cultural content of the ethnic category A, from which it emerges. In this sense, the cultural content of the ethnic category A and ethnic group A', as its derivative, would be {x, y, z, t}. In

other words, there emerges a congruity between the cultural contents of ethnic category and ethnic group.

Second, the ethnic identity that ethnic political elites construct and promote may rule out some cultural attributes that are present in the cultural content of the ethnic category. For instance, in our running example, except for $\{x, y, z, t\}$, constructing an ethnic identity based on any of other subsets, which are $\{x\}$, $\{x, y\}$, $\{x, z\}$, $\{x, t\}$, $\{x, y, z\}$, $\{x, y, t\}$, $\{x, t, z\}$ will fall into this scenario. In this sense, there will emerge an incongruity between the cultural content of the ethnic category A and that of ethnic group A'. Here emerges an incongruity between the cultural contents of ethnic category and ethnic group. These two scenarios trigger a process of negotiating meaning of the ethnic identity or a process of cultural compromise. The second scenario is conducive to significant theoretical and empirical consequences under some conditions, to which I will return in the next section.

These two scenarios are mediated by cultural proximity and cultural distance between dominant and minority ethnic categories. The notion of cultural proximity and cultural distance has long been paid a great deal of scholarly attention. While some scholars emphasize intra-civilizational cultural proximity and inter-civilizational cultural distance (Huntington, 1993), others examine cultural proximity and distance between "ethnic groups" [ethnic categories in my conception] (Barth, 1969; Lake & Rothchild, 1996; Gurr, 2000; Fearon, 2003), and still others focus on the cultural proximity between tribes (Moerman 1965; Barth 1969, 18). What connects these scholars is the argument that cultural proximity, if any, paves the way for collaboration between the members of these collectivities.

In the literature of ethnicity there are two main approaches to this issue. Gurr (2000) measures cultural proximity and distance by looking at a combination of factors (e.g., language,

religion and social customs). Fearon (2003), on the other hand, only focuses on language structures to define if two ethnic categories are culturally proximate or distant. I assume that Gurr's approach is more comprehensive and helpful for my purpose in this study. If dominant and minority ethnic categories have any cultural attributes in common (e.g., religion, a myth of common origin, language or social customs), I consider them to be culturally proximate. Common cultural attributes lay the foundation for ties to emerge between the members of different ethnic categories. As Barth points out, "the positive bond that connects several ethnic groups in an encompassing social system depends on the complementarity of the groups with respect to some of their characteristic cultural features. Such complementarity can give rise to interdependence or symbiosis" (Barth, 1969, 18). Anthropologists, as a general tendency, prefer using the term "interdependence" in order to emphasize cultural proximity between ethnic categories (Moerman, 1965). Turks and Kurds in Turkey (common religion), Sunni, Shia, and Maronite Arabs in Lebanon (common language), Mandes, Peuls, and Voltaics in Mali (common religion), Wolofs, Pulars, and Serers in Senegal (common religion), English and Scots in Britain (common religious faith), and Christians and Muslims in Yoruba (the common myth of ancestral city and language) (Laitin, 1986) exemplify culturally proximate ethnic categories. In some contexts, two ethnic categories are culturally distant, a small segment of the minority ethnic category, however, may be culturally proximate to the dominant ethnic category as it is the case for Shia Kurds in Iran.

Distant ethnic categories, however, are those that share no cultural characteristics in common. In such cultural contexts, ethnic conflicts are more protracted and irreconcilable because there is little possibility for cross-cultural ties to ripen (Caselli & Coleman, 2013). This is not to say that culturally distant ethnic categories cannot coexist peacefully, but rather that

ethnic boundaries in such cultural contexts are more visible and stronger. Bulgarians and Turks in Bulgaria, Romanians and Hungarians in Romania, Jews and Arabs in Israel, Russians and Chechens in the Russian Federation, Russians and Lithuanians in Lithuania, and Macedonians and Albanians in Macedonia are some examples of distant ethnic categories. All these ethnic categories differ from one another in terms of their language and religion. In some cases, although two ethnic categories are culturally proximate some sub-groups within the minority ethnic category may be culturally distant to dominant ethnic category. For instance, Alawite Kurds in Turkey have no cultural attributes in common with Turkish ethnic category.

In a context where dominant and minority ethnic categories are distant, ethnic entrepreneurs are more likely to adopt the first scenario by defining and promoting an ethnic identity based on a cultural content that is overlap with the cultural content of the ethnic category. In other words, ethnic entrepreneurs are more likely to pick all cultural attributes that are present in the cultural content of ethnic category to define an ethnic identity on which they aim to construct an ethnic group. A basic logic is in place here. In such contexts all the cultural attributes of a minority ethnic category contribute to the distinctiveness of minority ethnic category from the dominant category. Thus, it is in the interest of ethnic entrepreneurs to define an ethnic identity with a broader cultural content that overlaps the content of ethnic category because it is more likely to increase the chance of a successful cultural compromise between the ethnic elites and the members of ethnic category. This, in a way, radically reduces the magnitude of any resistance or opposition of ethnic members to the perception of ethnic identity that ethnic political elites aim to construct and promote. Ethnic elites in such contexts are, thus, more likely to successfully put ethnic members on the same page in terms of the meaning of ethnic identity and the political purposes. It is because of this fact that within a cultural context, in which

dominant and minority ethnic categories are distant, the general tendency of ethnic members is to support ethnic political elites. For instance, Turks in Bulgaria (Birbir, 2007), Hungarians in Romania (Craiutu, 1995), Albanians in Macedonia (Huber, 2012), Fon and Gouns in Benin (Koter, 2013), and Arabs in Israel are predominantly support ethnic political organizations.

In contexts where dominant and minority ethnic categories are culturally proximate that they share certain cultural attributes (such as religion, language), there may emerge what anthropologists (Barth, 1969; Moerman, 1965) call interdependence between these ethnic categories. Common cultural features are more likely to generate some formal or informal institutions that paves the way for cross-ethnic ties and trust. For example, in Mali, “the myth of cousinage” (Dunning & Harrison, 2010), in Yoruba “the myth of ancestral cities” (Laitin, 1986), and in Senegal and Indonesia, Islamic Sufi brotherhoods (Galvan, 2001; Koter, 2013), function as social mechanisms to bring together members of different, yet proximate, ethnic categories in the same political organizations by creating cross-ethnic trust. Ethnic category members, in such settings, may develop internalized ethnic identity forms that include cultural attributes that are common with the dominant ethnic category. For instance, Bruinessen (1992, p. 36) indicates that Shia Kurds in Iran as opposed to the Sunni Kurds “never played any part in the Kurdish movement” in Iran due to sharing common faith with the majority Persian ethnic category.

In this sense, such contexts are somewhat challenging for ethnic entrepreneurs in terms of ethnic group formation. Ethnic entrepreneurs are more likely to adopt second scenario by constructing ethnic groups based on the cultural attributes that are not shared with the dominant ethnic categories. There, thus, emerges an incongruity between the cultural contents of ethnic category and emerging ethnic group. Here a simple logic is at work. In order to mobilize ethnic members for certain political objectives, ethnic political entrepreneurs need to emphasize the

distinctiveness of their ethnic category from the dominant one and to devalue the common cultural characteristics that create inter-ethnic trust or collaboration. As a consequence, they tend to rule out or ignore common cultural attributes from the content of the identity they want to construct and promote. The process of negotiating meaning of the ethnic identity in this scenario would be more challenging than the first scenario where there is an overlap between the cultural contents of ethnic category and ethnic group because ethnic members may develop resistance to the identity the ethnic entrepreneurs construct, an identity that rules out some cultural attributes that might fervently be embraced by a significant portion of ethnic members.

These two tendencies of ethnic political elites emerge from their concerns of ethnic boundary setting or maintenance. In order to mobilize ethnic category members, they need to show and convince ethnic members that their ethnic category clearly differs from rival ethnic categories. To this end, ethnic entrepreneurs treat all cultural attributes as potential cultural markers that can demarcate a clear boundary between their ethnic groups and rival groups or categories.⁴² Thus, “particular cultural attributes may vary in salience, may be constructed or reconstructed, and may even be discarded by an ethnic group [ethnic entrepreneurs], depending on the particular sociohistorical circumstances of their interactions with other groups [cultural distance or proximity], and the need to maintain effectively the boundaries between them” (May, 2003, p. 99). Ethnic boundary maintenance functions as a basic causal mechanism that structures the strategies of ethnic entrepreneurs in terms of picking certain cultural attributes from the cultural content of their ethnic categories, on which they construct a particular perception of ethnic identity. In other words, certain cultural attributes are chosen or discarded based on this

⁴² Some scholars (Nafziger & Auvinen, 2002) argue that political elites sometimes use ethnicity as a cover for their personal or ideological interests. I don't ignore this point, yet here I want to discuss the strategies that ethnic political elites employ during ethnic group formation processes.

mechanism of boundary maintenance (Jenkins, 1997). In contexts where ethnic categories are culturally distant, all cultural attributes present in the cultural content of ethnic category will contribute to the ethnic boundary setting or maintenance. Thus, in such settings, there is no reason to discard any of these attributes from the cultural content of ethnic identity proposed by ethnic elites. In context where ethnic categories are culturally proximate, however, ethnic entrepreneurs tend to discard cultural attributes that are shared with other ethnic categories, cultural attributes that make boundary maintenance difficult. In such settings, it is more likely to emerge an incongruity between the cultural contents of ethnic category and ethnic group.

Here, some significant points need to be noted. First, these are theoretical probabilities and might not necessarily occur in every ethnic setting. In this sense they cannot be generalized to every case. I develop this framework as a contingent or benchmark model that works under certain conditions. I argue that the congruity and incongruity between the cultural content of ethnic category and the cultural content of ethnic group constructed by ethnic entrepreneurs may have significant consequences in terms of ethnic group formation and ethnic political behavior. This is especially so in Muslim societies if the source of the incongruity is religion. It is in such settings where secular and non-secular forms of ethnic identity emerge and produce significant political outcomes. In the next section, I will elaborate more on this issue.

Second, ethnic categories, ethnic groups or ethnic identities are not things in the world but “cognitive schemes” that exist and operate in our minds and perceptions (Barth, 1969; Brubaker, 2002, 2009; Brubaker & Stamatov, 2004; Jenkins, 1997). They are a social fact but not a fact in nature. “Social facts should not be treated as things” (Abrams, 2006, p. 122). Brubaker (2002) suggests to take ethnicity, race and nationhood as “perspectives on the world. These include ethnicized ways of seeing (and ignoring), of construing (and misconstruing), of inferring

(and misinferring), of remembering (and forgetting)” (pp. 174–75). Here, Brubaker gets closer to the way Bourdieu locates habitus. Habitus (here read as ethnicity or ethnic identity):

The Habitus [ethnic identity] only exists inasmuch as it is inside the heads of actors. Second, the habitus [ethnic identity] only exists in, through and because of the practices of actors and their interaction with each other with the rest of their environment... In this sense, the habitus [ethnic identity] is emphatically *not* an abstract or idealist concept. It [ethnic identity] is not just *manifest* in behavior, it is an integral *part* of it (Jenkins, 1992) (italics are original).

This is a significant point in the sense that ethnicity as a “cognitive scheme” or habitus may shape how ethnic individuals perceive the world around them and define their interests.

“Interests (material or ideal), not ideas, determine the actions of man. But the world-views, which have been created by ideas, have often acted as switchmen in defining the pathways along which the dynamics of interests have moved their behavior” (Wimmer 2002, p. 35).

Third, the disintegration of empires in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries provides rich historical data about ethnic group formations through processes of cultural compromise. For instance, the gradual disintegration of the Ottoman Empire paved the way for a fertile ground for the activities of ethnic entrepreneurs who later became the founding fathers of subsequent nation-states. Historical data indicates that, especially in the Balkans, ethnic entrepreneurs got into a fierce competition in transforming Slavic-speaking and orthodox Christian peasants in the region into the Greeks, the Bulgarians, the Serbs and the Romanians. These ethnic entrepreneurs led these peasants to negotiate the meaning of their cultures and decide which national/ethnic category they belong to (Kalyvas, 2008; Karakasidou, 1997; Livianos, 1999). They join this process of cultural compromise with their internalized culture forms as Wimmer suggests. Again, it is only after the politicization of ethnicity that ethnic category members get into a process of negotiating meaning on collective and symbolic level.

Secular and non-secular forms of ethnic identity

The framework that I have laid out so far may have significant implications in terms of the nexus between ethnic identity and political behavior. A possible incongruity between the cultural content of the ethnic identity constructed and promoted by ethnic political elites and that of ethnic category constructed by the everyday practices of the ordinary members may pose significant challenges to ethnic entrepreneurs in terms of ethnic group formation. Individuals develop their internalized ethnic identity perceptions within the cultural environment, to which they are born, and within which they socialize. If the ethnic identity perception that is constructed and promoted by ethnic elites differs from internalized ethnic identity perceptions of ethnic members in terms of cultural content, there emerge an incongruity, something that may make the process of negotiating the meaning of ethnic identity relatively challenging for the ethnic political elites.

This becomes a matter of further contestation particularly if the source of incongruity is religion. In such contexts, I argue, ethnic identity assumes two forms. First one is *secular ethnic identity* that excludes religion as a defining attribute of ethnic identity. Secular ethnic identity has a cultural content that includes only non-religious cultural attributes such as language, myth of common origin, and skin color. Second one is *non-secular ethnic identity* that has a cultural content that, together with some other cultural features, includes religion as a strong defining attribute. These forms are continuously subjected to the processes of cultural compromise, by which ethnic members negotiate, embrace, adapt or refuse them. I suggest that these two forms of ethnic identity mostly emerge in Muslim ethnic categories. The analysis that I will provide below, thus, is mainly about Muslim ethnic categories and groups.

Here I need to clarify some important themes so that any potential points of confusion would be eliminated. First, in the literature of ethnicity, religion is generally treated as a discrete and autonomous identity, on which ethnic categories may emerge. Many ethnic categories in all around the world are formed and defined exclusively based on religious affiliations such as Maronite, Sunni and Shi'a ethnic categories in Lebanon, Sunni, and Alawite ethnic categories in Syria, Catholic and Protestant ethnic categories in Ireland. In these cases, religion functions as a discrete and autonomous ethnic category. In other words, despite many commonalities between these ethnic categories, the only or the most distinctive cultural attribute that separates these categories from one another is religion.

However, in many cases, religion functions not as a discrete and autonomous ethnic category but only as one of cultural attributes of an ethnic category. The following passage I quote from Horowitz (1985) explicitly illuminates this significant fact:

Outside the West religion remained an ascriptive affiliation. For many groups, religion is not a matter of faith but a given, an integral part of their identity, and for some an inextricable component of their sense of peoplehood. When missionaries began their work in colonial Burma and Java, the early reaction of subject peoples was that conversions produced fundamental changes in identity: "The Sundanese (or, for that matter, the Javanese or any other group)," wrote a contemporary observer, "consider conversion identical with *masuk Belanda* (becoming Dutch), with a change of *bangsa* (people)" (pp. 50–51).

Here religion is not the only defining attribute of Sundanese and Javanese ethnic categories but it is, viewed by ethnic members, as one of inextricable components of them. Ghodsee (2009) documents, in a similar fashion, that the majority of Bulgarians view Orthodox Christianity as an indispensable component of Bulgarian ethnic identity. For example, "[m]any Bulgarians believe that to change religious affiliation is to change ethnic and cultural identification" (Ghodsee,

2009, p. 234). It is because of this understanding that Bulgarian Muslims (*Pomaks*) are not considered as Bulgarians by Orthodox Bulgarians despite the fact that they are ethnically Bulgarian. It is the case for the Yezidis as well. They are a religious minority living in Northern Iraq. They speak Kurmanji and identify as Kurds, “but some of the more pious Muslims [Kurds] nevertheless refuse to recognize them as Kurds because of their religious peculiarities” (Van Bruinessen, 1992, p. 38). For Balkan ethnic categories, such as Serbian (Orthodox Christianity), Croatian (Catholicism), and Bosniak (Islam), the situation is the same (Ayata, 2004; Leustean, 2008).

An incongruity between the cultural contents of an ethnic category and ethnic group may emerge from cultural attributes other than religion as it is the case for the Iraqi Kurds mentioned above. Such incongruities may lead to significant political outcomes. However, disparities between the cultural contents of ethnic categories and ethnic groups that stem from religion have stronger political implications. The notion of religion as an integral cultural attribute of ethnic categories is quite prevalent in Muslim world. Islam can intensely penetrate to the internalized ethnic perceptions of ethnic category members, something that can produce a powerful barrier in front of ethnic political elites who promote secular ethnic identity forms in Muslim societies. As noted by Abdelal (2006), cultural contents of ethnic identities are always subjected to contestation but if the religion as a cultural attribute is the source of contestation, it can create serious challenges for ethnic political elites who aim to construct an ethnic group on the basis of a secular ethnic identity.

Now one may raise a question here. As rational actors why would ethnic political elites alienate ethnic members by proposing a secular ethnic identity that rules out religion from the cultural content? In other words, in order to muster wider support from the members of their

ethnic categories, why would they propose a secular ethnic identity instead of a non-secular one? These are reasonable questions. However, conditions under which ethnic political elites operate usually impose certain strategies on them. There are two ways of answering these questions. First, ethnic political elites can be ardent secular personalities who have a distaste for religion. Many Muslim political elites in the modern history fall into this category such as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk of Turkey, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran, political leaders of Egypt, Tunis and Algeria in the modern times. These elites blame relative backwardness of Muslim societies on Islam so that they have a strong distaste for it. Atatürk and Reza Pahlavi, for instance, attempted to construct secular Turkish and Persian identities that alienated larger segments of their people. In Turkey, there emerged two versions of Turkish nationalism. First one is *Türk ulusalcılığı*, which refers to a secular Turkish nationalism adopted by Kemalist segments of Turkish society. Kemalists remove religion from the cultural content of the Turkish identity. The second one is *Türk milliyetçiliği*, which refers to what I call non-secular ethnic identity that includes religion as a significantly defining cultural attribute. These political elites accept the risk of alienating larger masses due to their ardent ideological commitments.

Second, there is a more practical need that obliges ethnic political elites to construct and promote secular ethnic identity forms at least at the initial phases of ethnic group formation processes. In an ethnic setting where majority and minority ethnic categories belong to the same religious tradition, there emerge a practical need for ethnic political elites of the minority ethnic category. Islam as a religion with its notion of *umma* (the community of believers) is a unifying force for the Muslims. In such settings, ethnic political entrepreneurs who aim to mobilize members of an ethnic category, they start with constructing and promoting an ethnic identity that is clearly distinct from the majority ethnic category. Thus, ruling out common cultural features

and emphasizing differences in the construction of an ethnic group seems to be a rational mobilization strategy for ethnic political entrepreneurs. They, first, will likely solicit potential supporters who do not have attachments to the common cultural features within the dominant ethnic category, or who place more value on distinctive features. They, thus, focus on the most distinctive cultural attributes and leaves out the ones that are in common with the majority ethnic category. In other words, they have to convince their fellow co-ethnics that they are culturally different from the majority ethnic category by eliminating or minimizing the role of Islam as a uniting force. This would be a logical tactic in order to persuade the members of the minority ethnic category for a political action.

Thus, in settings where majority and minority ethnic categories are culturally proximate on the basis of Islam, it is more likely that ethnic entrepreneurs will propose or construct a secular ethnic identity that leaves Islam out of the cultural content and focus on the most distinctive cultural attributes in order to form an ethnic group. They in a way initiate a process of cultural comprise or contestation that can alienate larger segments of the members of their ethnic categories. This is a risk that is rationally taken at the initial phases of ethnic group formation in order to establish a solid and permanent base for the emerging ethnic group. Although it is an initially smart strategy to promote a secular ethnic identity in such environments, it can turn out to be an obstacle in the later phases when it comes to widen the size of the ethnic group. Accomplishing this feat entails a strenuous process to induce a cultural compromise. The ethnic political entrepreneurs have to compete with many other forces for winning the support of ethnic members, such as non-ethnic political parties as well as other social mechanisms that produce inter-ethnic cohesion.

In settings where majority and minority ethnic categories are culturally distant, namely they have no common cultural characteristics, all cultural attributes in the cultural content of the ethnic category can be used by ethnic political elites in order to form an ethnic group striving for certain political goals. For instance, Chechens in Russia, Turks in Bulgaria and Greece, Palestinians in Israel are cases in point. In these cases, majority and minority ethnic categories are culturally distant so that ethnic political elites do not rule out any cultural attributes from the cultural contents of the ethnic groups they construct and promote. In such settings the process of cultural compromise would proceed smoother than the previous scenario where religion is ruled out of the cultural content of the constructed ethnic category. It is possible to argue that in settings where majority and minority ethnic categories are culturally distant the overwhelming majority of the members of a minority ethnic category are more likely to support ethnic political organizations, if there are any. Palestinians in Israel, Hungarians in Romania, Turks in Greece exemplify this pattern.

Conclusion

I develop this perspective in order to better understand how religion and ethnicity interact in the Kurdish case in Turkey. As I illustrated in the third chapter, a significant portion of the Kurds in Turkey distance themselves from the pro-Kurdish political parties that seek political autonomy for the Kurds. Despite the presence of many encouraging factors such as high ethnic polarization, violence and economic deprivation, the political behavior of the Kurds who vote for the non-ethnic political parties (predominantly the ruling AKP) refer to an outlier case, a careful examination of which may be conducive to more nuanced theoretical and conceptual innovations. I discussed available alternative explanations provided by journalists, political pundits and academics. The most widely adopted argument is that religious Kurds support the

ruling party for its Islamist agenda and shy away from the secular ideology of the pro-Kurdish parties. However, I also indicated that the pro-Kurdish HDP also receive a significant support from the pious Kurds as well. This led me to think carefully about the interaction between Kurdish identity and Islam in Turkish context and come up with the theoretical insights that I have formulated in this chapter.

Again, I must note that I do not provide a theory of ethnic voting behavior that would explain why Kurds vote for the parties they do. Instead, I want to understand if the Kurds who support the pro-Kurdish parties and the Kurds who support the ruling AKP display a clear variance in terms of their perceptions of the Kurdish identity in relation to religion. This was the issue that I searched for an answer. The theoretical arguments I laid out in this chapter is a product of this endeavor.

In the next two chapters, I will argue and empirically illustrate that Kurds who support pro-Kurdish political organizations adopt a secular Kurdish ethnic identity that Kurdish political elites have been constructing since 1960s. No matter they are religious or secular, those who support Kurdish political parties adopt a secular Kurdish ethnic identity that rules out religion from the cultural content of the Kurdish identity. On the other hand, the Kurds who vote for the ruling AKP mainly adopt a non-secular Kurdish identity that is inextricably intertwined with Islam. In other words, the Kurdish supporters of the AKP, as opposed to the supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP, view religion as a significantly defining cultural attribute of Kurdishness. I do not argue that this is the factor that shape political preferences of the Kurds in Turkey. There are many factors that can play a role in shaping the political behaviors of the Kurds such as material incentives, being exposed to indiscriminate violence by the state, tribal ties, and of course ideological factors. All these dynamics can more or less play a role shaping the Kurdish political

behavior in Turkey. I depart from the fact that a significant portion of the Kurds support the ruling AKP and aim to understand if they differ from the supporters of the pro-Kurdish political parties in terms of the perception of the Kurdish ethnic identity in relation to Islam. The theoretical insights I postulated in this chapter must be evaluated according to this point.

Chapter 6 – The construction of a Secular Kurdish Identity

In the previous chapter, I developed a theoretical perspective on the interaction of ethnicity and religion in Muslim societies. I argued that two possible forms of ethnic identity can emerge in relation to Islam. The first is secular ethnic identity, which is defined based on non-religious cultural attributes such as language, tribal ties, and the myth of common origin. The second is non-secular ethnic identity, which includes religion as a strong defining attribute. In this chapter I will discuss the process of the construction of a secular Kurdish ethnic identity by Kurdish ethnic elites over the years, particularly since the 1960s, when the Kurdish political elites started their intensive literary and political activism in Turkey.

As I discussed in the second chapter, despite the fact that Kurdish entrepreneurs have aimed to construct a Kurdish ethnic group out of the Kurdish ethnic category since the inception of the Turkish Republic in 1923, it was the leaders of the PKK who succeeded in achieving this long-sought objective by resorting to violent means such as terrorist attacks and guerilla warfare. The PKK's strategic use of violence signified a breaking point in the history of Kurdish political activism in terms of the tactics used to construct a Kurdish ethnic group. Ethnic political elites in the 1960s and 1970s, before the PKK came into existence, employed peaceful strategies, i.e., establishing civil society organizations, political parties, and literary activism, to form and promote a solid and viable Kurdish ethnic group, but in the end they failed.

However, in terms of constructing a particular perception of Kurdishness, that is, promoting a specific cultural content for ethnic identity, it is possible to identify a continuity between the past and the present. I suggest that there exists no fracture in terms of the type of ethnic identity form that Kurdish political elites have constructed and promoted since the 1960s, as Kurdish entrepreneurs have promoted a secular Kurdish identity. The PKK's leaders inherited

this secular form of Kurdishness from the Kurdish political elites that preceded them. The ethnic group-making enterprise usually entails a particular understanding of ethnic identity that is proposed and promoted by ethnic political elites. As I discussed in Chapter 5, ethnic entrepreneurs, while attempting to construct an ethnic group out of an ethnic category, usually start with initiating a process of negotiating the cultural meaning of their ethnic identities. They offer and promote a particular perception of ethnic identity with a specific cultural content that they expect to provide common ground between them and their followers in their efforts to struggle for certain political objectives. To this end, I will argue, Kurdish political elites have created and promoted a secular form of Kurdish ethnic identity.

In fact, the construction of a secular form of Kurdish identity started at the beginning of the 20th century, but gained momentum after 1960 as a reaction to two traditional cultural institutions of the Kurdish ethnic category in Turkey: religion and tribal structure. As discussed in the second chapter, the Kurdish political and cultural landscape between 1923 and 1960 was greatly dominated by religious Sufi Sheiks and tribal chiefs (*Ağa*). Sufi sheiks, due to their religious authority, exerted an immense influence on their disciples, an influence that, to a limited extent, still endures among the Kurds. Compared to sheiks, however, Tribal chiefs exercised a kind of secular power over their subjects, a power that stemmed from both kinship relations and economic domination. These two social institutions (Sufi brotherhoods and tribal structures) profoundly defined cultural and political life in the Kurdish populated regions during this period (Bruinessen, 1992).

It is no coincidence that Kurdish uprisings or revolts against the Turkish state that erupted between 1923 and 1938 were planned, initiated and led either by Sufi sheiks (such as the Sheik Said rebellion in 1925) or by tribal chiefs (such as the Koçgiri rebellion in 1921 and the Dersim

rebellion in 1937-1938) (Bruinessen, 1992). Religion and Tribal structure are two significant cultural attributes that constitute the cultural content of the Kurdish ethnic category together with the Kurdish language. It must be noted that the ethnic elites of these periods were not concerned with forming a Kurdish ethnic group on the basis of a particular understanding of Kurdishness. Their main motives were religious and/or tribal. In this sense, they did not attempt to promote a particular form of Kurdish ethnic identity that would form a basis for a possible ethnic group.

It is possible to argue that, despite some earlier activities of Kurdish political elites at the beginning of the 20th century, the Kurdish cultural and political landscape between 1923 and 1960 was heavily shaped by the tribal and religious revolts and the harsh military measures of the state to suppress these revolts. The military coup in 1960 and the promulgation of a new constitution one year after marked a new era for Kurdish political and cultural activism. As I discussed in the second chapter, Kurds started to participate in intense literary and political activism by publishing periodicals, reports, and books and establishing civil society organizations as well as political parties. Despite the suppression of all these activities by the Turkish state, these literary provided a foundation on which a secular Kurdish identity has been constructed and promoted since.

For the sake of clarity and parsimony, I will examine the construction of this secular form of Kurdish identity through three time periods that, I posit, comprise inherent features that require differential treatment.

Age of Nations and Nationalism and the Kurdish Identity

As was stated in Chapter Two, Kurdish literary activities and cultural production in Turkey gained significant momentum after the 1960s as a result of the new constitution, which to some extent expanded the margins of political and cultural freedoms. The 1960s mark a time of

increasing momentum but not the starting point for Kurdish cultural production. It was a period that came after a relatively silent era in terms of ethnic political and cultural activities. The suppression of the Kurdish revolts that took place in 1920s and 1930s led to a relatively dormant period in terms of Kurdish issues, political struggles, and cultural/literary production until 1960s. But we should not ignore the Kurdish cultural activities in the last decade of the Ottoman Empire that preceded this silenced phase.

At a time when the Muslim subjects of the empire experienced an identity crisis in face of the surge of nationalist and secessionist movements, Istanbul-based Muslim Ottoman intellectuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds began to contemplate and locate their own ethnic identities vis a vis Ottoman identity. This period was very vibrant in terms of ethno-cultural activities. As part of this environment of dynamic cultural production, Kurdish intellectuals in Istanbul initiated a process of negotiating the meaning of Kurdishness and its relationship with supra-ethnic Ottoman and Islamic identities. To this end, new Kurdish political and cultural foundations were established in the 1910s, each of which published a number of journals and newspapers in order to communicate their opinions regarding Kurdish identity to the Kurdish masses. Among these publications were *Roji Kurd* (1913), *Yekbun* (1913), *Hetawi Kurd* (1913), and *Jin* (1918). In the following discussion, I will briefly examine the ideas and opinions about the Kurdish ethnic category put forward by these publications, with a particular focus on *Jin*.

The common objective among the publications of these period was to stimulate a Kurdish national sentiment among the Kurdish subjects of the empire, a people who had seemed to come late to the process of national awakening compared to the other nations of the empire. Contributors tended to simultaneously address two types of readers in terms of the messages they conveyed. First and foremost, they aimed to address the Kurds in order to mobilize them for a

nationalist struggle in the age of nations and nationalism, or else, according to the contributors, Kurds would miss the opportunity to be the masters of their own fates. One can sense a message of urgency included in these texts, an urgency that called on Kurds for immediate action before the closing of a window of once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Second, these publications addressed non-Kurdish readers as well, an address that hoped to convey the idea that Kurds were qualified to be a nation, like others, with deep cultural roots in history and geography.

The Kurdish intellectual production of the time involved many issues concerning the Kurdish condition which can be classified under three main themes for the sake of clarity. The first theme was the idea that Kurds were about to be too late for a national awakening so risked losing the future at a time when a new world order based on nations was emerging. One can infer from the contents of the texts published during this period that the notions of nation or nationalism were alien to the larger segments of the Kurdish subjects of the Ottoman empire due to the other solid forms of loyalties such as religion and tribal memberships. The following quote from one of the Kurdish periodicals (*Jin, life*) of the time clearly reflects this point:

despite your glory and fame [Kurdish people], being this needy and giving up on your homeland with sluggishness is a shame. You who have dignity will pay attention to my word as a matter of course. For the sake of our fathers and ancestors, come together and unite. Do not sacrifice our beautiful homeland to gross self-interest and leadership struggle because time is pressing and the enemy is benefiting from our heedlessness. Run towards freedom and improvement. Otherwise we will regret but it won't fix anything at all (Kadizade, 1918, p. 16, this author's translation).

Another author addressed Kurdish youth to arouse their commitment to a national awakening by stating:

O [Kurdish] youth! You are now our nation's hope. Yes, the life [survival] of Kurdistan is of concern. Don't you dare run after misleading dreams. Today, the missions that are incumbent on

you are of great significance. We are going through dangerous and quite important days. Don't sleep! ...It is only we [the Kurds] can save ourselves (Siverekli, 1918, p. 9, this author's translation).

There are many similar writings in the Kurdish publications of this period. Because the main focus in this chapter is on the construction of a secular Kurdish identity after the 1960s, I will not discuss further details about this issue.⁴³

The second theme is that the publications of this period endeavored to demonstrate that the Kurds were a separate nation with a unique history and culture of their own. Strohmeier (2003) argues that this effort to claim a distinctive cultural history for the Kurds reflected that “the writers of *Roje Kurd* [or other Kurdish periodicals of the time] obviously accepted the view that a nation was a group of people with a common language, culture and history” (p. 45). For instance, Abdullah Cevdet, a prominent Kurdish intellectual of the time, wrote in the first issue of *Roje Kurd* published in 1913:

We live in an era in which nations are taking shape. Individuals who do not have a certain personality possess no social value. It is the same with nations. A people without personality commands no respect. They are nothing more than a big mass of human beings. The function which memory has for an individual corresponds to the role of history of peoples...If a people does not have a written and complete history, it is as if that people had never lived...The century in which we live is no joke. This is the 20th century. A people which does not possess the history of its past and its future is not its own master. Peoples and individuals who are not their own masters become the possession of others (quoted in Strohmeier, 2003, p. 48).

⁴³ For a detailed discussions about Kurdish literary activities at the beginning of the twentieth century, see Strohmeier (2003), Ozoglu (2004), and Bozarslan (1985).

Cevdet was here advising his fellow Kurds to focus on Kurdish historical existence and construct an ethno-historical consciousness. Following this advice, many authors attempted to reflect on Kurdish cultural history including folk traditions, oral history, and the cultural features of the Kurdish populated territories of the empire. As part of this effort, an article published in the first issue of the periodical *Jin* (1918) made a significant argument in terms of the historical origin of the Kurds, an argument that paved the way for subsequent Kurdish nationalist arguments and laid the ground for the construction of a secular Kurdish ethnic identity after the 1960s. For example, the legend of Kawa the Blacksmith, which was first narrated in *Shahname* (Book of Kings) written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi, first appeared as a Kurdish myth of origin in *Jin*. According to the legend, Kawa the Blacksmith, a mythical hero, led an insurgency against the ruthless king *Dehak*, who carried two serpents on his shoulders, which he fed with the brains of children. When Kawa's children were taken by Dehak, he rose up against the ruthless tyrant, initiated a Kurdish national resistance, and finally freed the Kurds by killing Dehak. Decades after this legend appeared in *Jin* as the origin myth of the Kurds, in the 1960s it was turned into a key element in the construction of a secular Kurdish identity. According to the author, Kurdiye Bitlisi (a penname), myths play significant roles in explaining the origins of nations, so he proposed the legend of Kawa as a myth of origin for the Kurdish people (Bozarslan, 1985).

As the third theme, Kurdish elites of the time had to deal with different forms of loyalties in order to construct a cohesive Kurdish national consciousness. As two powerful supra-ethnic identities, the Ottoman and Islamic identities posed significant challenges to the Kurdish elites' nationalist projects. For instance, Ottoman identity as a political identity created certain political barriers against other identities or significantly restricted Kurdish cultural/intellectual production. The Kurdish elites had to cope with this political restriction. Islam, as another supra-ethnic form

of loyalty, posed an even more powerful challenge to the Kurdish political elites because the idea of nationalism was not easily digested by the pious Kurdish masses. As I indicated in the second chapter, Islam has significantly shaped the cultural landscape of the Kurdish populated territories. Thus, Kurdish political elites had to reconcile these three identities.

Authors of the time displayed diverse approaches to the issue of an integral Kurdish identity. In such early periodicals as *roji Kurd* (1913) and *Hetawe Kurd* (1913) or contemporary newspapers, Kurdish authors recurrently stressed that Kurds were a separate nation but promoted this idea with very carefully. They first stressed that Kurdish people had always been loyal to the Ottoman empire and the sultan. Whenever the empire or sultan needed the Kurds, these publications emphasized, Kurds immediately served the cause (Strohmeier, 2003). The authors did not want to give a secessionist impression, something that would put those periodicals and newspapers in jeopardy. Thus, by emphasizing the loyalty of the Kurds to the sultan they sought to open a secure space for promoting a Kurdish national consciousness. As part of this effort, Strohmeier (2003) asserted, “they formulated a hierarchy of constitutive identities: the Kurds were first Muslims, then Ottomans; their Kurdish identity was subordinated to the other two” (p. 39). However, even this careful language could not protect some of these publications from being shut down by the government.⁴⁴

However, in later publications such as *Jin*, Kurdish authors, at least some, explicitly targeted and blamed Ottoman rule for the cultural, economic and political backwardness of the Kurds. This became possible partly because the Ottoman identity emerged from the World War I profoundly weakened. Once the Ottoman identity lost its political power and appeal, Kurdish

⁴⁴ Some Kurdish intellectuals maintained their efforts to construct a Kurdish national identity in exile. For instance, the Bedir Khan brothers continued to publish a journal, *Hawar*, in Levant up until the 1940s, but their impact on the Kurdish masses in Turkey was somewhat limited.

intellectuals attempted to reconcile a Kurdish national awakening with Islam as a supra-national identity. To this end, in their writings they promoted the idea that creating and having a Kurdish national/ethnic consciousness was entirely compatible with Islam with a particular reference to a verse in Qur'an: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another" (49:13) (Strohmeier, 2003). They used this verse as a justification of their nationalist activities and to persuade Kurdish masses to adopt Kurdish nationalism.

The relationship between Kurdish identity and Islam has since become a source of debate. In the Kurdish publications (periodicals and newspapers) of this early period, secular and religious Kurdish intellectuals worked together, aiming to create a Kurdish historical consciousness without getting into an ideological struggle. For instance, secular Kurdish authors never explicitly questioned the high status of religion within Kurdish culture. The only issue that reflected the split between secular and religious contributors to these publications was the debate about what alphabet to use. While secular authors support adopting the Latin alphabet in order for Kurds to be on the same page with the Western civilization, religious figures insisted on using the Arabic alphabet in order to maintain their cultural ties with the other Muslim nations (Bozarslan, 1985; Özoglu, 2004; Strohmeier, 2003).

Nevertheless, it is still possible to distinguish between two forms of Kurdish movements, both of which strived to form a Kurdish ethnic group on the basis of two different understandings of Kurdishness. The first was the movement that Bedirxanis (a noble urban Kurdish family) initiated and led to form an ethnic group on the basis of a secular Kurdish identity with the hope of uniting all Kurds from different religious (Sunnis, Shias, Alawites and Yezidis) and linguistic

(Kurmanji, Sorani, Zazaki and other Kurdish dialects) backgrounds. This movement was secessionist in character and aimed to establish a separate state for the Kurds (McDowall, 1992).

The second movement was initiated by Sheikh Sayed Abdulkadir, who sought to form a Kurdish ethnic group based on a non-secular Kurdish ethnic identity that targeted only pious Sunni Kurds (Van Bruinessen, 1992, p. 51). Abdulkadir's movement sought political autonomy for the Kurds (Van Bruinessen, 1992; McDowall, 1992). While the first movement represented urban intellectual Kurds, the second movement represented lower classes. These movements, however, failed to achieve their objectives for reasons that included political pressure from the government and the tribal and religious realities on the ground. The leaders of these movements had very limited or no cultural, religious or political influence compared to the influence that tribal chiefs and local Sufi Sheiks, who addressed concerns shaped by tribal and religious interests,⁴⁵ exerted on the Kurdish masses.

There are two legacies of this period significant for the subsequent decades of Kurdish cultural production. First, the legend of Kawa the Blacksmith as the founding myth of Kurdishness has received a great deal of attention from Kurdish intellectuals and elites including Abdullah Ocalan, the founder of the PKK. The nationalist Kurdish literature now uses this legend to assert a common origin for the Kurdish people. Second, the relationship between Islam and Kurdish identity has become a debatable issue since then. As we will see in the rest of this chapter, Kurdish political elites took a radical and strong stance against Islam during and after 1970s, an attitude that changed in the 2000s.

⁴⁵ As my objective in this chapter is to focus on the construction of the secular Kurdish identity since 1960s, I do not go deeply into details of the period before 1960s. For more information about Kurdish political activism during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, please see Özoglu (2004), Natali (2004), McDowall (1996), Tan (2010), and Laçiner and Bal (2004).

The Production of a Secular Kurdish Identity

The new constitution and harsh Turkification policies promulgated in 1924 by the newly established Turkish republic left no room for Kurdish cultural production (Alış, 2012). None of the Kurdish journals and newspapers published in the previous two decades of the Ottoman Empire could survive. As was discussed in the second chapter, in the first two decades of the Turkish Republic the Kurdish issue turned violent when Kurdish tribal and religious leaders revolted against the Turkification and secularization projects of the new Turkish government. The period between 1923 and 1960, thus, was a silenced period in terms of Kurdish literary activities.

Things radically changed after the military coup in 1960. The military regime promulgated a new constitution that expanded the margins of political and cultural rights, which, ironically, significantly helped pave the way for Kurdish political and literary activities. I will show that this period marks the early efforts of Kurdish political elites to construct a secular Kurdish ethnic identity oftentimes without a direct reference to the concept of Kurdish identity due to political restrictions imposed by the Turkish government. The journals and newspapers published by Kurdish leftist intellectuals in 1960s and in 1970s, as a contribution to the construction of a secular Kurdish identity, took a critical stance towards tribal and religious structures within Kurdish society based on the argument that Kurdish people lagged behind due to these two institutions (Gündoğan, 2012).

Kurdish students and intellectuals were divided into two main camps. The first camp consisted of religious/conservative Kurds who worked with/for conservative political parties, and the second camp included leftist Kurds who collaborated with leftist and/socialist political parties. It was the second group that initiated and led Kurdish political and cultural activities in

1960s. Among the periodicals and newspapers, they published in 1960s were *İleri Yurt* (Advanced Homeland ,1959), *Bariş Dünyası* (A World of Peace, 1962), *Dicle-Fırat* (1962), *Deng* (Voice, 1963), *Yeni Akış* (New Current, 1966), *Doğu* (East, 1969). This group attempted to construct a secular Kurdish identity through certain themes such as homeland, literature, language and myths. The common point among these efforts in the 1960s was the implicit antipathy toward the religious and tribal features of the Kurdish culture.

For instance, one of the prominent Kurdish intellectuals of the time, Musa Anter, published an article in *Deng* titled “Kürdlerde Din” (Religion among the Kurds), in which he argued that the original religious beliefs of the Kurds had been inspired by fire, referring to a Zoroastrian past:

According to significant sources, Kurdish theological/religious belief was inspired by fire because Kurds had accepted fire as the source of enlightenment, righteousness, and truth. It is thus that they worship fire. Over time this sacredness was extended to the sun as well (Anter, 1963, p. 9, this author’s translation).

Although the author did not explicitly devalue Islam, this statement may be interpreted as a radical step towards the creation of a secular Kurdish identity. By discussing pre-Islamic Kurdish religious practices, the author started a trend among the secular Kurdish elites in terms of dissociating the Kurds from their Islamic past. Later some Kurdish politicians and intellectuals promoted the idea that Zoroastrianism was the national religion of the Kurds. For instance, Murat Karayılan (2015), one of the most prominent leaders of the PKK, argues that

In pre-Islamic times, Kurdish ideological identity and national ideology were Zoroastrianism. When Zoroastrianism as the national ideology of the Kurds was overcome, an alienation from national values took place at the ideological level among the Kurdish society... This situation set the ground for an alienation from the self, societal existence, and reality. Thus, the extent of

treason has almost always corresponded to the level of resistance [to the domination of other nations] in Kurdistan (p. 30, this author's translation).

As discussed in the second chapter, Kurdish publications in 1960s did not explicitly mention the name Kurds due to the political restrictions of the time but instead raised the problems of the people of the East, referring to the Kurdish populated regions of Turkey, a measure taken to avoid legal consequences. Thus, it is not possible to talk about an explicit Kurdish identity construction in the 1960s but the ground was laid for the subsequent efforts in 1970s and 1980s. For instance, Musa Anter (1991) claimed that writers focused on the most distinctive elements of the Kurdish culture or identity in their efforts to construct a Kurdish national awakening, as a result of which they disregarded Islam. This critical stance against the religious and tribal institutions of the Kurdish ethnic category was further radicalized, especially by Marxist-Leninist Kurdish activists in 1970s and 1980s. These radical activists found their main antagonists in religious and tribal forces among the Kurdish society. In line with their Marxist ideology, they portrayed Islam and Kurdish tribal features as the agents of colonial exploitation of the Kurdish people and lands.

In order to form their own “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983) in an ethnic group, in the 1970s Kurdish political and intellectual activists, predominantly Marxists and socialists, started to historicize the Kurdish identity they wanted to construct through certain myths – i.e., those related to homeland, common origin, and resistance (Hirschler, 2001). Their initial objective was to establish a link between the present Kurds and a glorious pre-Islamic past, which led to the argument that Kurds were the descendants of the Medes, an argument that Russian orientalist Vladimir Minorsky (1913) proposed for the first time. This link between the Kurds and the Medes as an Iranian people led the Kurdish elites to see and portray the cultural features of the Medes as the national cultural values of the Kurds, including their religious

beliefs (Zoroastrianism), their myths (Kawa the Blacksmith) and celebrations (Newroz). These features provided the Marxist/socialist Kurdish political elites with an opportunity to construct a secular Kurdish ethnic identity that ruled out Islam and whose universalism significantly challenged nationalist parochialism or particularism.

To begin with the myth of resistance discussed earlier in this chapter, the legend of Kawa the Blacksmith's struggle against Dehak, after its first appearance as a Kurdish legend in the Kurdish journal *Jin* in 1918, it was later used as the myth of Kurdish common origin by Ihsan Nuri (1976), a former Ottoman officer who initiated and led the Kurdish Ararat uprising against the Turkish Republic in 1930. However, the extensive use of this legend as a myth of common origin and resistance began in the 1970s. The Kawa legend fulfilled two significant goals in the construction of a secular Kurdish identity. First, it denoted the starting point for the Kurdish people by referring to both the bravery of the Kurds against a ruthless tyrant and the historical depth of Kurdish existence. Second, consistent with the Marxist-Leninist orientation of the Kurdish elites of the time, Kawa the Blacksmith was represented as a proletariat leader (Aydın, 2014), a revolutionary character who led a peasant/proletariat revolution. Kurdish publications in the 1970s, including a journal named *Kawa*, extensively disseminated this legend as a myth of both common origin and resistance.⁴⁶

The day Kawa killed the ruthless tyrant Dehak marks a significant date, which is called Newroz, a celebration that has been treated as a major symbol of Kurdish nationalism at a growing pace since the 1980s. While the legend of Kawa itself has been unknown to large segments of the Kurds, yet the idea behind it has been conveyed to the Kurdish masses through the Newroz celebrations that take place every year on 21st of March. It is reasonable to say that

⁴⁶ For detailed analysis of how the legend of Kawa and Newroz was used as a myth of common origin by Kurdish elites, see O'Shea (2004), Aksoy (1998), and Aydın (2014).

Newroz celebrations have become one of the most visible features of secular Kurdish identity. Millions of Kurds in around the world join these celebrations. To be sure, Newroz is not a celebration that is exclusively peculiar to the Kurds. Many Central Asian nations celebrate Newroz as well, but with diverse meanings and contents. What makes Newroz special for the Kurds is that it effectively facilitates imagining a Kurdish ethnic group, a platform that communicates the elites' perception of Kurdishness to larger Kurdish masses.⁴⁷

The legend of Kawa, Newroz celebrations and Zoroastrianism, as cultural elements of Kurdish identity, are products of the Kurdish elites' efforts to link Kurdish present with a distant or pre-Islamic past. Because Islam was seen as an "agent of colonial exploitation" by Marxist-Leninist Kurdish activists in the 1970s and 1980s, they focused on the Kurdish pre-Islamic periods. In order to better understand this issue, in this section of the chapter I focus on the PKK's radical stance against Islam after the 1980s. As a political movement that has dominated the Kurdish ethnic group formation activities since then, this organization's cultural production is significant. Based on the presumed link between the Kurds and the Medes, the legend of Kawa, and Newroz celebrations, the PKK has attempted to maintain the production and promotion of a secular Kurdish identity through various channels such as publications, broadcasting, and conferences. Here I will analyze the organization's monthly journal *Serxwebun* (independence)⁴⁸ and books published by two significant leaders of the PKK.

⁴⁷ To be sure, there are many other vehicles through which the Kurdish political elites have disseminated the particular Kurdish ethnic identity they constructed to the Kurdish masses, including music groups and academies, Kurdish language and cultural institutions, journals, TV and radio networks. For detailed information, see Güneş (2012, p. 101–123.). During 2000s, the meaning attributed to Newroz celebrations underwent a transformation "from the use of Newroz to achieve closure of identity by emphasizing Kurdish difference and distinction, to openness to the other cultures, and as a common symbol to achieve peace and harmony" (Güneş, 2012, p. 122).

⁴⁸ This journal has been regularly published since 1982, reflecting the PKK's ideology, action plans, political and cultural projects. It is published in Turkish with some Kurdish pages.

The PKK's elites promoted the argument that Zoroastrianism was the "Kurdish national ideology" or "national Kurdish belief," because, they argued, it corresponded to the Kurdish golden ages in terms of independence and societal progress (Karayılan, 2015). However, the argument goes, with the Muslim Arab military incursions into the Kurdish inhabited lands and subsequent conversion of the Kurds to Islam, Kurds lost their societal momentum and became a nation colonized by Arabs, Persians and Turks, or, in Abdullah Öcalan's words, they were reduced to a "cadaver status" (Aydin & Emrence, 2015, p. 36). As Serxwebun (1982) claimed,

The Kurdish people have been enslaved under foreign domination over the centuries and thus lowered to the status of a pariah nation that could not take a step beyond being a tool used either in the struggles between colonizing powers, or in the occupation of new territories and enslaving other nations (p. 9, this author's translation).

The PKK's Marxist-Leninist leadership cadres singled out sectarianism and tribal social structure as the two most significant obstacles to Kurdish political/national unity, making the people vulnerable to the dominations of other nations (Güneş, 2012, p. 103). This view was a logical outcome of the Marxist ideology that the PKK's leadership cadres adopted, which produced a strong distaste for religion (Ekinci, 1990, p. 367). In the early 1980s, the PKK established the National Liberation Front in order to achieve national unity among the fragmented Kurds. The program of the National Liberation Front published in 1982 clearly reflected the PKK's stance against the tribal and religious social institutions among the Kurds:

The National Liberation Front will protect and develop the national values of the people, [and] *destroy all forms of tribal and sectarian fragmentation to achieve national unity....*The Front will play its historical role by achieving national unity for the first time in Kurdistan's history (quoted in Gunes, 2012, p. 103, italics added).

This perspective paved the way for ensuing endeavors to focus on the cultural foundations of Kurdish identity (imagined or real) that would transcend the aforementioned divisions among the Kurds and lessen their vulnerability. To this end, the organization's journal *Serxwebun* recurrently enunciated the argument that the Kurds displayed great social and political achievements when they devoutly followed their national religion, Zoroastrianism, but their conversion to Islam following the Arab conquests initiated a horrendous period of subservience as sectarian and tribal divisions fragmented the Kurdish people. The PKK equated progress and unity with Zoroastrianism and Islam with division, deterioration, and regression. More specifically, they portrayed Islam as the ideological force that drove and accelerated Arabs conquests and invasions.

The main argument proposed by the leaders of the PKK is that after converting to Islam Kurds failed to adapt this new religion to their authentic culture in a way that would have led to their social and political progress. Instead, they developed a religious culture with certain institutions, i.e., *şeyhlik* (spiritual leaders of Sufi brotherhoods) and *seyyidlik* (descendants of Prophet Muhammad) that led to their self-subordination to other hegemonic cultures such as those of the Persians, Arabs and Turks (Karayılan, 2015; Öcalan, 2008, 2015), who, they argue, have successfully instrumentalized Islam in order to advance and strengthen their political and cultural domination. In the following excerpt, Karayılan (2015) exemplifies this perspective on the role of Islam among the Kurds:

When Islamic expansion reached Kurdistan, a new era started for the Kurdish people. Until the advent of Islam, the essential belief system or philosophy of the Kurds was Zoroastrianism.

During the emergence of Islam, Kurdistan was in a miserable condition due to the wars between the armies of the Sasanian and Roman Empires. After securing its victory in the Arabian Peninsula, Islam embarked upon conquests with a supremacy enforced by the sword and faith.

The road to expansion further North laid through Kurdistan. And Islamic armies were forging paths to Kurdistan's door in the 640s. Although they initially resisted these armies, the Kurds, exhausted and depleted from being caught between two armies for centuries, started to see Islam as a balancing power. Islamic armies emerged as a third power to enable Kurds to get rid of Sasanian and Roman empires' invasions. Thus, although they initially resisted Islamic armies, they converted to Islam as a kind of savior (p. 30, this author's translation).

Karayilan argues that Islam emerged as a liberator or an exit strategy from the invasions of Sasanian and Roman empires, so the Kurds had no option but to accept the control of Islamic armies. The author argues that conversion to Islam, however, marked a downward turn in Kurdish history.

With the growth of Islamic culture, although to some extent Zoroastrianism maintained its existence, as the ideological identity and religion of the Kurds it gradually eroded. A foreign culture [Islam] blocked the collective Kurdish memory and instigated a new era [in Kurdish history]. In this sense, it would be right to divide the course of Kurdish societal progress into two periods, before and after Islam.... Islam made significant changes in Kurdistan's social structure. It made the most essential change in the upper levels of the Kurdish hierarchy. Alongside the *Mirs* (chieftains) as the leaders of the tribes and tribal confederations in the Kurdish tribal system, new layers of leadership, *sheikhs* and *sayyids*, came into existence.... While one [mir or ağa] served as political leader, others [sheikhs and sayyids] assumed roles of spiritual leadership.... More often than not, Sheikhs and sayyids, rather than tribal chiefs and mirs, became more decisive in guiding the [Kurdish] society.... These categories [sheikhs and sayyids], which we can call ideological agents, played [important] roles in the Arabization of the [Kurdish] society. As Kurds were detached from their national ideology [Zoroastrianism], their ideological linkage with foreign powers was fostered and perpetuated (Karayilan, 2015, pp. 30–31, this author's translation).

Clearly, from this perspective Islam is seen as a foreign or external culture that has replaced the Kurdish national ideology and faith of Zoroastrianism. Thus, argues the author, Islam is not part of authentic Kurdish cultural legacy. Because Kurds failed to tailor this new foreign culture to fit into their cultural traditions, but rather allowed it to displace their authentic faith, they deviated from the right path of national/cultural progress and subordinated themselves to Persians, Arabs and Turks.

For Kurdish people and its religious segments failed to develop an interpretation of Islam peculiar to Kurdish society. While Islam became viewed as a source of enlightenment, progress and empowerment for other nations, it became a cause of division, fragmentation, capitulation to others, and political attenuation for the Kurds.... As its hegemonic character penetrated to the cellular level of society in Kurdistan, Islam decimated Kurdish culture, making the people ideologically dependent [on foreign cultures or powers] (Karayilan, 2015, p. 32, this author's translation).

In other words, according to Karayilan, Islam could have played a progressive role, but Kurds failed to develop their own interpretation of it, an interpretation that would benefit the Kurdish cultural features. Rather, the Kurds accepted Islam as a foreign dogma that eventually assimilated them into Arab culture. Thus, deviating from Zoroastrianism as their national ideology/religion, the Kurds lost their own societal progress, and with conversion to Islam, their social and political unity. While Sunni Kurds pledged allegiance to *Sunni* sultans as khalifs, *Shia* and *Alavite* Kurds became loyal to Iranian shahs. According to this argument, shahs and khalifs instrumentally used Islam in order to subordinate Kurds to their authority with the help of Kurdish Islamic leaders in the two factions, sheikhs and sayyids, who, as a cause of division among the Kurds, were considered a significant obstacle that needed to be dismantled.

Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK's imprisoned leader, articulated such views, arguing that Zoroastrianism was the first and Kurdish Alawism was the second cultural resistance front while equating *Sunni* Islam with treason:

Zoroastrianism is a kind of cultural resistantialism. It is a Kurdish culture's noble resistance to alienation. Kurdish Alawism wrapped up with a weak and pro-Ali Islamic cover is the strongest Kurdish cultural resistantialism after Zoroastrianism; it is Shiism among the Kurds. On the contrary, Sunni Islam, which flourished in the plains of south Kurdistan, developed the most sinister and devious character. These representatives of the feudal-merchant mentality who deny their [Kurdish] lineage are super traitors.... They are splendid co-conspirators and self-serving. (Öcalan, 2015, p. 294, this author's translation).

For Abdullah Öcalan (2015), Naqshbandi sufi orders imply the highest form of treason in that they make Kurds ideologically dependent on "colonizing powers," and "without thoroughly examining the Naqshbandi treason in Kurdistan, there is no possibility for experiencing a revolution of enlightenment" (p. 295).

For many years after 1982, the PKK's journal *Serxwebun* published and promoted these views over and over again. They continued to portray Islam as a foreign assimilationist culture in the Kurdish cultural landscape, an agent of colonialism that set the ideological ground for the colonialization of Kurdistan and exploitation of the Kurds, as exemplified by the following paragraph from *Serxwebun*:

While Arab, Persian and Turkish dominant classes, by means of Islam and its institutions [tariqa, sheikhs and sayyids], ensured their national advancement, Kurdish dominant classes tended towards collaboration and treason, so that these institutions as well as the Kurdish dominant classes became the greatest preventive force [against unity among the Kurds] (Serxwebun, 1983, p. 11, this author's translation).

The main point being made in such arguments is that Islam had never been part of the authentic Kurdish culture or identity. Islam and the institutions it created among the Kurds acted as foreign organs within the Kurdish body and blocked Kurdish cultural/national and political progress. In many issues of *Serxwebun*, this view was discussed recurrently. In its 142nd issue published in 1993, the journal quoted a paragraph from the PKK's manifesto, written by Abdullah Öcalan, *Kürdistan Devriminin Yolu* (The national Road to Kurdish Revolution) that clearly equates Islam in Kurdistan with treason.

With Islam a horrendous era started in the history of Kurdistan. Arabs launched non-stop offensives in order to establish their control over Kurdistan's fertile lands and develop feudalism. Kurds displayed a great resistance to Arabs and Islam. Arab domination could be established only after 250 years of resistance that lasted from the seventh to the tenth centuries. Under Arab colonization, a strong pro-Arab and pro-Arabization comprador class emerged within the feudal social structure that was generated in Kurdistan. This class, which despised Kurdish national values and abandoned the Kurdish language and culture, which had been flourishing until then, acted as an agent of Arab language and culture. Of course, their class interests necessitated such action as the pathway to becoming *emirs*, *beys* went through Arabization and subservience to Arab khalifs. All of these acts of national treason were presented to the people as a requirement of the "sublime Islamic teachings," and a great deal of success was achieved by these means (*Serxwebun*, 1993 p. 20, this author's translation).

Serxwebun promulgated such views repeatedly, and there is no need for further examples. It has been made clear by now that the Kurdish political elites in the 1970s, 1980s and partly in 1990s aimed to dissociate Islam from the cultural content of the Kurdish ethnic identity upon whose reconstruction they embarked. This was a radical view given that Islam has been a critical ordering principle in Kurdish social and cultural affairs for centuries as discussed in the second

chapter. In other words, as King (2017) commented, “for Kurds of Turkey, religious and ethnic identity have long been intertwined or at odds. [Yet] they are to a great degree inextricable from each other” (p, 107). As I discussed in the earlier theoretical chapter, ethnic elites generally focus on the cultural features that clearly distinguish their ethnic category from others in their efforts to construct an ethnic group for certain political purposes. For Kurdish political elites, Islam with its supra-national or universal claims was seen as a barrier to creating a Kurdish ethnic identity that was clearly distinguishable from Turkish identity. Besides their Marxist ideological distaste for Islam, they pursued a rational strategy for the initial stages of constructing a Kurdish ethnic group, by which, according to Aydın (2014), “They tried to reveal the cultural differences that distinguished Kurds from other nations (p. 74). This secular Kurdish identity was claimed, reconstructed, and communicated through various mass communication channels including music groups, newspapers, TV and radio networks, various publications, etc.⁴⁹

A New Friendly Language Towards Islam

The Kurdish political elites succeeded in forming a Kurdish ethnic group out of the Kurdish ethnic category that could sustain guerilla/terrorist attacks for years, but after the second part of the 1990s they faced a significant challenge in their efforts to become a mass movement that used legal political grounds. According to Aydın and Emrence (2015), the secular Kurdish identity that they constructed and disseminated “failed to promote an inclusive Kurdish political identity” (p. 36). The cultural content of this secular Kurdish identity, which ruled out Islam, was contested by the majority of the Kurds. When they understood that they needed fresh and

⁴⁹ Some significant debates broke out among Kurdish intellectuals and authors over the history of the Kurds. These debates reflected different approaches and views on the issue. For a detailed analysis of such a debate that took place in the Kurdish newspaper *Özgür Gündem* and its successors in the 1990s, see Hirschler (2001).

wider support from the Kurdish masses, especially for the pro-Kurdish political parties running in the elections, Kurdish political elites changed their intransigent discourse on Islam.

It must be stated, however, that this change took place only at the discursive level as Kurdish political entrepreneurs never gave up the secular cultural content of the Kurdish identity they constructed over the years. They started to promote the idea that religion is a basic human need and a culture, and thus must be respected. They attempted to develop a friendly language towards religion including Sunni, Shia and Alawite Islam and Yezidi faith. This change first appeared in Öcalan's book, *Din Sorununa Devrimci Yaklaşım* (A Revolutionary Approach to Religion) published in 1990.

He starts the book with a criticism of Communism's hostility towards religion and argues that this hostile approach is one reason why revolutions do not develop in the Middle East:

The rejectionist approach to religion under the name of communism produced a negative effect in the Middle East. This approach led to isolation from society and paved the way for reinforcement of obscurantist movements. It can even be said that the rejectionist approach to the reality of religion, referring to a bold application of dialectic materialism, is one of the reasons behind the non-development of revolutions in the Middle East (Öcalan, 2008, p. 11, this author's translation).

Öcalan clearly indicated that communist/socialist movements in the Middle East could not endure or would remain extremely isolated because they failed to address the reality of religion in a cultural setting where Islam had made a deep imprint. To prevent such isolation from society, he explicitly suggested that his followers and movement desist from pursuing a hostile stance against Islam or religion at large. In his book, he starts his analysis with explaining how and why religions emerged in the first place and then he proceeds to discuss the revolutionary nature of Prophet Muhammad and Islam. He also argues that the PKK's ideology and *its modus*

operandi are not incompatible with Islam. One can sense the now friendly tone of Öcalan's language towards Islam while he continued to put blame on the dominant classes for instrumentalizing Islam in order to exploit Kurdish people:

With their culture and belief, Kurds constitute one of the most important components of the Islamic community. Till now, Turks, Arabs, and Persians have used Islam against Kurds. However, Islam does not belong to one nation....Like other Islamic nations, Kurds should have the right to live independently and develop their culture autonomously. Embracing Islam should not mean being a slave to other Islamic countries. Rather, fighting against slavery and domination is compatible with Islam. Hence, fighting against Turkish, Arabic, and Persian colonialism and exploitation is a duty for our people, who believe in Islam (Quoted in Sarigil, 2018).

In line with Öcalan's new approach to Islam, the PKK's second congress held in 1990s set new goals for the movement regarding religion. These goals, which were published in *Serxwebun*'s August 1990 issue, called for institutionalizing the union of [patriotic] imams, taking the Alawi faith as a motive for national resistance, and putting an end to sectarian division and strengthening national unity.

Today there are certain establishments such as mosques and tariqa [Sufi brotherhoods] that function as religious institutions. The Enemy [i.e., the Turkish state] has kept these institutions under its [control].... Under the auspices of paid "religious personnel," a state's propaganda institution was created.... We have to reconsider and reevaluate these [institutions]. In order to free them from the MIT's [Turkish central intelligence agency] supervision, creative approaches need to be undertaken.... Our goal is to turn each mosque into a propaganda and resistance center for national independence. In particular, Friday sermons have to be transformed into propaganda describing the atrocities of the enemy, and of the people's demands for independence and freedom. It is our duty to collect and compile the related verses [of the Qur'an] and of *Hadis*

[sayings of Prophet Muhammad], and present them to the [Kurdish] people (*Serxwebun*, 1990, p.21, this author's translation).

This new discourse of the compatibility between Islam and Kurdish nationalism resembles the efforts of Kurdish intellectuals who wrote in the Kurdish journals and newspapers in the first two decades of the twentieth century as I discussed earlier in this chapter. As a response to Ocalan's new approach to religion, the Kurdish political movement in Turkey established its own religious associations in the early 1990s such as *Kurdistan Yurtsever İmamlar Birliği* (the union of Kurdistan Patriotic Imams), *Kürdistan Islami Hareketi* (the Kurdistan Islamic Movement), *Kürdistan Yezidiler Birliği* (the Union of Kurdistan Yezidis), and *Kürdistan Aleviler Birliği* (the Union of Kurdistan Alawites). It should be noted again that this new friendly language towards religion does not imply a deviation from the secular Kurdish ethnic identity they constructed over the years. It emerged as a necessity for appealing to larger Kurdish masses. In this way they aimed to address all religious groups within the Kurdish society in order to get rid of any divisive role religion might play among the Kurdish people. Whereas the previous strategy was to cultivate a hostile attitude towards religion in general, but the new strategy is to embrace all religious faiths and traditions that are present within the Kurdish society so as to use them for their political cause. These two strategies shared the same goal, which was to overcome religious divisions among the Kurds and eliminate the impact of the national religious groups in Turkey over the Kurds.

With the turn of the new millennium, the Turkish political landscape became more and more open to religious discourses with the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which since then has had strong support from the Kurds (Bahceli & Noel, 2011; Efegil, 2011;

Sarıgil, 2018).⁵⁰ The AKP's strong appeal among the religious segments of Kurdish society led pro-Kurdish political parties or Kurdish political elites to develop new strategies to deal with the challenges the AKP posed. The AKP's Islamist agenda has been a source of appeal among the religious sectors of the Kurdish society in Turkey (Çarkoğlu & Hinich, 2006; Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009; Kalaycıoğlu, 2009; Sarıgil, 2018; Yavuz & Özcan, 2006). Election campaigns of the ruling AKP in the Kurdish populated districts and provinces have emphasized religious themes, taking advantage of the secular character of the Kurdish political movement. In order to eliminate this problem, the pro-Kurdish political parties developed new strategies.

One of them was to activate the previously established religious associations that I discussed above. These associations organized conferences on religious issues with the purpose of urging religious Kurds to rally around pro-Kurdish political movements. The members of the Union of Patriotic Imams of Kurdistan attended the pro-Kurdish BDP's electoral meetings or Newroz celebrations wearing traditional Islamic dress and addressed Kurdish masses in support of pro-Kurdish BDP. As part of these efforts, Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK, called for Democratic Islam Congresses (Dağ, 2014; Sarıgil, 2018). One was held in the province of Diyarbakir, the center of the Kurdish political and cultural activities, in 2014. Öcalan shared his views on Islam and religion by sending a letter to this congress. The Congress proposed the constitution of Medina⁵¹ as a model for the resolution of the Kurdish problem and

⁵⁰ One of the most significant reasons behind the Kurdish political elites' new friendly discourse on Islam was that the AKP has effectively used the PKK's hostile stance against religion in its electoral campaigns, something that undermined the pro-Kurdish political parties' credibility among religious Kurds. I will discuss this issue in the next chapter.

⁵¹ The constitution of Medina was agreed upon among the Muslim, Jewish, and pagan communities of the city of Medina after the Prophet Muhammad's migration in 622 from Mecca to Medina, a contract that regulated the rights and duties of these separate communities living in the city. This document is also seen as "Muhammad's pact with the Jews of Medina" (Arjomand, 2009).

Kurdish right of self-determination that is compatible with the essence of Islam (Dağ, 2014; “Demokratik Islam Kongresi Sonuc Bildirgesi,” 2014).



Picture 6.1. As part of the Kurdish political elites’ new friendly approach to Islam, a retired Kurdish imam holding Qur’an in his hand is addressing the crowd in a protest meeting in Diyarbakir in 2008, organized by pro-Kurdish political party, the DTP.

In his letter Öcalan offered a new form of Islam, which he calls “cultural Islam,” as an antidote for the political or power-centered versions of Islam. Dağ (2014) summarizes this position as follows:

He sees religions as a set of cultures that will constitute a system free from the state structure, but at the same time will lead to a reformation of Middle Eastern societies. Thanks to this vision, he rejects the claims of being atheist, communist or materialist and instead re-defines his movement as a contemporary synthesis of Salahaddinian and Huseynian movements.

This notion of cultural Islam refers to a secular form of Islam that is radically separated from the political domain and restricted to the individual and private realm. During my fieldwork in Turkey, I personally observed that the overwhelming majority of members of the Kurdish ethnic group (the supporters of the pro-Kurdish political party) adopt this notion of cultural Islam. I will discuss this point in the next chapter.

The second strategy was to organize alternative Friday prayers outside the mosques, in which pro-BDP imams preached sermons in Kurdish. The Kurdish political elites put the government-paid imams in the region under scrutiny, and blamed them for acting as agents of the government who disseminated the propaganda of Turkish state. They gathered significant crowds for these alternative Friday prayers. This was part of the civil disobedience campaign initiated by the pro-Kurdish BDP. All of these activities as part of the Kurdish political movement's "religious opening" (Sarigil, 2018) do not correspond to a change in terms of the construction of a secular Kurdish identity advocated since the 1960s. Kurdish political elites never gave up this secular identity, rather they expediently changed their discourses and stance towards religion and promoted the notion of secular "cultural Islam," in order to struggle against the appeal of the ruling AKP within the Kurdish society.

Conclusion

Kurdish political entrepreneurs have been constructing a secular Kurdish ethnic identity since 1960, an identity with cultural content that rules out religion. This secular Kurdish identity was primarily constructed on the bases of a myth of common origin, common history, and common homeland. The legend of Kawa and Newroz celebrations have been extensively used for the construction of this identity. In other words, the entrepreneurs initiated a process of negotiating the meaning of the Kurdish identity. As part of this process, they have continually

constructed and promoted a Kurdish ethnic identity, the cultural content of which until recently has ruled out Islam. Although they have softened their hostile stance against Islam, they have never given up promoting this secular Kurdish identity.

In the next chapter, I will discuss how this proposed secular identity has been contested, admitted or rejected by the Kurds. I will empirically demonstrate that while Kurdish political elites successfully put their followers on the same page in terms of the cultural content of the Kurdish ethnic identity, a significant portion of the Kurds who support the ruling AKP adopt a non-secular Kurdish ethnic identity.

Chapter 7 – Contending Ethnic Identity Perceptions: Secular Kurdish Identity versus Non-secular Kurdish Identity

In this chapter I examine the identity perceptions of the Kurds in relation to their political/voting preferences. As I have argued throughout this study, ethnic category and ethnic group refer to different phenomena in the empirical world. As I have demonstrated in the fourth chapter, ethnic political elites, to a great extent, successfully put their followers (the members of the ethnic group or those who adopt politically active forms of ethnic identification) on the same page in terms of ethnic political and cultural demands. In the fifth chapter, I have further argued that ethnic political elites successfully put their followers on the same page in terms of the meaning of the ethnic identity that they create and promote. I will empirically test this argument in this chapter.

Following the lead of sociologist Andreas Wimmer, in the fifth chapter I theoretically argued that ethnic political entrepreneurs simultaneously initiate a process of negotiating the meaning of their ethnic identities when they attempt to construct an ethnic group out of an ethnic category in order to pursue certain political objectives. They generally propose an ethnic identity with cultural content, the attributes of which clearly delineate borders between in-groups and out-groups (Abdelal et al., 2006; Schatz, 2004b; Wimmer, 2002, 2008). Based on this argument, I further proposed that, in relation to religion, two possible perceptions of ethnic identity can emerge in Muslim-majority ethnic categories: secular and non-secular ethnic identity perceptions.

In the previous chapter, I have shown that a secular Kurdish identity, proposed and promoted by the Kurdish political elites, has been in the making since the 1960s. Kurdish political elites have radically dissociated Islam from the cultural content of Kurdish identity on

the basis of the argument that Islam represents a foreign culture (Arabic) and has long acted as an agent of Arab, Persian and Turkish colonial exploitations of the Kurdish people and their lands. Despite the fact that they later developed a friendly language towards Islam, they have never seen it as part of Kurdish identity. They communicated this secular perception of Kurdishness to the Kurdish masses through such channels as journals, newspapers, TV and radio broadcastings, mass celebrations, music groups and live speeches.

In this chapter, I argue that Kurdish political elites successfully put their followers on the same page in terms of this secular perception of the Kurdish identity. Here I do not neglect the agency of the Kurds who support Kurdish political entrepreneurs. As I discussed in the previous chapter, their strong adherence to Islam forced secular Kurdish political entrepreneurs to change their hostile attitudes towards religion. On the other hand, I propose that they have successfully shaped the perceptions of their followers regarding the relationship between Islam and Kurdish identity. I will indicate that the secular Kurdish identity perception that Kurdish elites have constructed is now widely embraced by members of the Kurdish ethnic group. The most striking point is that even religious supporters of the Kurdish political elites adopt this secular perception of Kurdish ethnic identity. In this regard, there is a clear difference between those who support the pro-Kurdish political party and those who support the ruling AKP.

This chapter proceeds as follows. In the first part, I will discuss how the secular Kurdish ethnic identity has faced significant challenges in the Turkish political landscape, including the state's counter propaganda and the discursive opposition of the ruling AKP to this secular Kurdish identity perception. In the second part, I will analyze data that I collected in Turkey to show how the Kurdish followers of both the pro-Kurdish HDP and the ruling AKP differ in terms of their identity perceptions.

Secular Kurdish Identity Versus Non-Secular Kurdish Identity

As I discussed in the second chapter, Islam has been a significant feature of Kurdish ethnic category for centuries. As many authors have documented, Islam, in this sense, has been seen as a significant component of Kurdish identity (Atacan, 2001; Van Bruinessen, 1992, 1998b; Leezenberg, 2017; Ozoglu, 2007). Kurdish political entrepreneurs' efforts to construct a secular Kurdish ethnic identity in such a cultural landscape, thus, have triggered strong reactions, counter discourses, and challenges that eventually led Kurdish political entrepreneurs to change their hostile stance towards Islam, if not their secular perception of Kurdish identity. There have been three sources of challenges to the secular Kurdish identity in the process of negotiating meaning of the Kurdishness.

The first challenge has emerged from within the Kurdish ethnic category. Religious segments of the Kurdish society led primarily by religious/spiritual leaders (mostly Sufi sheikhs) have strongly opposed this secular Kurdish identity that rules out Islam from the cultural content of Kurdishness. As Sakallıoğlu (1998) notes:

Beginning from the eighteenth century, the high profile of Khalidiya sheikhs (the leaders of tarikats), their madrasahs (religious seminaries), and mullahs (the teachers at the madrasahs) provided the central values and the particular ways of thinking and behaving as a Kurd. Without this Islamic connection, Kurdish primordial existence was meaningless (p. 90).

Since Kurdish entrepreneurs portrayed religious communities or movements in the Kurdish regions as agents of colonial exploitation and targeted them, these religious brotherhoods formed a strong ideological front against Kurdish political entrepreneurs. With the support of the state (Çakır, 2001), as a response to secular Kurdish ethnic identity promoted by the Kurdish political elites, Naqshbandi Sufi brotherhoods in the Kurdish lands have represented and disseminated a non-secular Kurdish identity, which is inextricably tied to Islam. In other words, they joined the

process of infusing the meaning of Kurdish ethnic identity, initiated by the Kurdish entrepreneurs, with their own perception of Kurdishness.⁵²

During my field research in a district in Istanbul, one of my informants, upon my request, took me to an educational institution (functioning both as a madrasa and dormitory for college students) run by a Naqshbandi order whose leader and the majority of the followers were of Kurdish origin. The person who was in charge of managing the institution was a religious scholar in his 60s. When I expressed my intention for an interview he declined my request with some excuses. He clearly indicated his suspicion about my intention and asked an acrimonious question: “why does an American university care about a study on Kurdish identity perceptions.” After I had explained my research objectives with more information and expressed my Kurdish ethnic background, he invited me to a *sohbet* (religious gathering where religious scholars talk about religious matters) that would take place a couple of days later. I attended the *sohbet* and met with the spiritual leader of the order, who was in his 70s. He was pleased by my presence in the *sohbet* where there were around 40 people, most of whom were ordinary members from different age groups. He introduced me to the crowd and talked about the importance of education, both Islamic and secular. He asked me to attend their gatherings whenever suitable for me. I attended those *sohbets* a couple of more times and had the opportunity to observe their discussions.

I could not conduct an interview with the Sheikh himself, but the person in charge of the institution consented to participate in my research. I asked about the PKK’s leader’s claims about

⁵² Naqshbandi brotherhoods are not alone in promoting a non-secular Kurdish identity against the PKK-led secular Kurdish block. Some other religious Kurdish communities like Kurdish Hezbollah (no ties with Hezbollah in Lebanon) and the Med-Zehra group, which are extensively involved in cultural production through publications, Journals and Newspapers. On these Kurdish religious communities in Turkey see Leezenberg (2017), Scalbert-Yücel (2017), Kurt (2015), Gürbüz (2013), and Atacan (2001) .

the roles of Naqshbandi orders in helping foreign nations exploit the Kurdish lands and culture.

With a calm manner, he said:

If it is about Kurdish culture, no one can deny *tariqas* (religious orders) contributions to the Kurdish culture. For centuries, they educated Kurdish people in madrasas. They opened madrasas in remote areas of the Kurdish lands to teach people religious sciences. Moreover, madrasas have taught Kurdish grammar for centuries as well. Even now, those who go through madrasa education speak better Kurdish than many Kurds... Their [the Kurdish political entrepreneurs'] main concern is not the Kurds or Kurdish culture; they use them to disguise their real intentions. They want to spread their leftist ideology among the Kurds. Their hostility towards *tariqas* and Islamic communities derives from their distaste for Islam... No matter what they argue or say, *tariqas* will continue to help Kurds learn their religion.

As mentioned in the second chapter, the spiritual leaders of these Sufi brotherhoods have significant impact on their members' social, cultural and political lives (Van Bruinessen, 1992). These religious communities have traditionally supported Islamist political parties in Turkey (Sakallioğlu 1998; Yavuz and Özcan 2006). In order to investigate the support of these communities for the AKP, I examine election results in three electoral districts (*Tillo*, *Menzil* and *Nurs*) that are located in the predominantly Kurdish populated provinces. The reason why I have chosen these districts is that they are either centers of significant Naqshbandi orders or hometowns of prominent spiritual leaders. Menzil, as a village located in the city of *Adıyaman*, is where the spiritual leaders of one of the largest Naqshbandi Sufi orders in Turkey reside. This religious community has a wide basis of support across Turkey. Tillo, as a district located in the city of *Siirt*, is a kind of sacred territory for the Naqshbandi orders for it has hosted famous religious/*spiritual* leaders and *madrasas* for centuries. Nurs is Said Nursi's hometown. Said Nursi was one of the most significant religious/*spiritual* scholars of Turkey in the 20th century.

He inspired many different religious communities in Turkey collectively known as *Nurcus* (including Fethullah Gülen’s movement). The populations of these districts are predominantly Kurds. As Table 7.1. indicates, the overwhelming majority of the people of these three districts support the ruling AKP.

Parties	Election results (%)								
	Tillo			Menzil			Nurs		
	2011	2015 (June)	2015 (Nov.)	2011	2015 (June)	2015 (Nov.)	2011	2015 June	2015 (Nov.)
AKP	78	63	73	97	100	100	71.72	46.7	56.8
HDP	15	31	22	–	–	–	13.93	48.1	38.4
CHP	1	0.9	0.9	–	–	–	0.34	0.34	–
MHP	2	1.7	1.2	1	–	–		0.68	0.35
Others	4	3.4	2.9	2	–	–	14.31	4.18	4.45
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 7. 1. Results of the last three elections in Tillo and Menzil and Nurs. Source: Turkey’s High Electoral Board website (www.ysk.gov.tr).

Although Kurdish electorates in Tillo and Menzil have reflected more or less stable voting behavior in terms of supporting the AKP, the results from *Nurs* have varied over the years. The AKP received 71.42 percent of the votes in Nurs in 2011, but its vote significantly decreased to 46.7% in the June elections in 2015 and increased again to 56.8% in the November elections in 2015. This variation might be explained by the fierce fight between the AKP government and the Gülen movement (inspired by Said Nursi) started in December 2013. As the hometown of Said Nursi, the village of Nurs has great significance for Gülen followers, who come from all around Turkey to visit this village and see the house in which Said Nursi was born. One of my informants, who was a sympathizer of Fethullah Gülen, noted: “I voted for and

wholeheartedly supported the AKP in the last three elections but I regret having done so now. Their indifference to the corruption scandals and policies toward the Gülen movement are a great disappointment. I hope they will realize that they are not on a right path” (interview in Istanbul July 2015).

The second source of counter reaction to the secular Kurdish identity was the Turkish state’s framing of the Kurdish political movement, which, according to Sarıgil (2018), has “constantly attempted to delegitimize the secular Kurdish movement in the eyes of the Kurdish masses particularly among conservative Kurds by calling Kurdish ethnopolitical actors ‘Marxist,’ ‘atheist,’ ‘infidels,’ ‘heretical,’ or ‘un-Islamic’ and therefore ‘illegitimate’” (p. 11). Although the Turkish state, since its inception in 1923, has always acted based on secular principles and implemented radical secularization projects within its borders, when it comes to the Kurdish issue, it has employed religious discourses and frames in order to delegitimize the Kurdish political entrepreneurs (Natali, 2005; Sarıgil, 2018; Dağ, 2017; Aslan, 1996; Jenkins, 2008; Jacoby and Tabak, 2015).

The last and perhaps the toughest challenge to the secular Kurdish identity that Kurdish political entrepreneurs have constructed has been posed by the Islamist political parties in Turkey, which have always had a strong support base among the Kurds of Turkey (Romano, 2006; Sarıgil, 2018; Watts, 2010, 1999; Çarkoglu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009; Efegil, 2011; Jenkins, 2008). In particular, the ruling AKP, since its first appearance in the elections in 2002, has been a major competitor of pro-Kurdish political parties. The party has radically transformed Turkish political landscape over the course of last 16 years, a transformation that made religion a significant subject in the electoral competition. The AKP’s past election campaigns targeting Kurdish electorates heavily involved religious references to the Islamic past, the notion of

Ummah, and of course the secular worldviews of the Kurdish political elites. The prominent figures of the AKP have consistently attacked the perception of secular Kurdish identity constructed and promoted by Kurdish political elites.

In almost all of his campaign rallies held in Kurdish provinces Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of the ruling AKP, explicitly attacked the pro-Kurdish political party and its politicians for their secular perceptions of Kurdishness or their “distance from Islam.” For instance, in a campaign speech he gave in Diyarbakır in 2015, Erdogan said: “All the oppressive and violent activities [of the PKK] in this region have an insidious objective. *This objective is to separate my Kurdish brothers’ and sisters’ faith, which they have carried for 1,376 years with dignity, from their ethnic identity.*” Erdogan’s remark on this issue clearly reflects how the secular Kurdish identity that has been proposed and constructed by the Kurdish political entrepreneurs paved the way for counter discourses in the Turkish political landscape. According to Erdogan, the Kurdish political movement wants to separate Kurdish identity from Islam, a claim that greatly resonates among the Kurdish supporters of the ruling party. One of the informants in this study, a man who was around 50 years old, said:

Kurdishness is strongly tied to Islam. If you squeeze Kurdish culture, Islam will come out of it. I can give you a simple example. In Kurdish when we want to thank to someone we say “Xwede ji te razibe” (may God be pleased with you), there are no any other words in Kurdish that we can use to say thank you. Islam has not only deeply shaped Kurdish culture it also shaped even our daily language. How can you separate it from the Kurdish identity?

When I reminded him about the presence of the term “spas” (thanks) in Kurdish, he responded that “yes, they [Kurdish elites] ‘stole’ it from Russian but I am pretty sure that most of the Kurds are not aware of this term and do not use it.” The claim that Erdogan raised in his speech seems to be shared by many of his Kurdish supporters. During my interviews with the Kurds that fall

into this category, I heard similar claims many times. Some even view the Kurdish political movements (the PKK and the HDP) as a source of *Fitna*.⁵³ “Just because of this *fitna*, many young Kurdish men and women lost their *iman* (belief) and lives. Many parents had to reject their children because of their ties to these “godless” organizations.”⁵⁴

Given the elections results since the beginning of the new millennium, Erdogan’s attack on Kurdish politicians in this respect have struck a receptive chord among the Kurdish masses, for whom Islam was a significant component of Kurdish identity. Thus, it is easy to find numerous examples of attacks similar to those of Erdogan on pro-Kurdish politicians and the PKK’s leadership. As part of these efforts, Erdogan also mentions the Kurdish entrepreneurs’ tendency to promote Zoroastrianism as the national religion of the Kurds: “My dear Kurdish brother! Be aware that they [the BDP and the PKK] do not have anything to do with Allah.... They believe in and practice Zoroastrianism” (quoted in Sarıgil 2018, Kindle location 1793-1795). The following quote from Erdogan clearly reflects his argument that the ruling party takes advantage of the incongruity between the secular feature of Kurdish political movement in Turkey and the historical reality of the Kurds, of which Islam has been a significant part for centuries.

We made history together. Selahaddin Eyyubi [a Muslim Kurd, who was the first Sultan of Egypt and Syria and the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty [following his triumph against the last Crusaders] is our common hero.... Those who perform namaz [prayer] and those who say “La ilahe illallah” [believing in and praying to only Allah] and those who have the love of Allah in their hearts cannot take sides with the terrorist organization [the PKK]. This land has a history shaped by the Koran, ezan [adhan, the call to prayer], and namaz. My religious, Muslim, Kurdish

⁵³ An Arabic word that refers to civil strife or unrest among the believers of Islam.

⁵⁴ Interview in Istanbul, 2015.

brother! When will you be aware of this conspiracy? You are the grandsons of Selahaddin Eyyubi, and it is time for you to say “Enough!” to this conspiracy. There cannot be any connection or relationship between you and the terrorist organization that does not pray to Allah or turn to the same qibla [the Ka’ba in Mecca, the holiest place in Islam] as you (Erdogan quoted in Sarigil, 2018, Kindle Locations 1801-1803).

In this process of contesting the meaning of Kurdish identity (including acts of violence, antagonistic debates and denunciations), the Kurdish political entrepreneurs have felt obliged to give up their hostile and/or indifferent stance towards Islam in order to expand their support base among the Kurds. As I discussed in the previous chapter, starting in the second half the 1990s and with increasing acceleration after the turn of the new millennium, Kurdish political entrepreneurs have developed certain strategies to deal with the counter discourses and challenges of the religious communities, the state and the Islamist parties (Romano, 2006; Sarigil, 2018; Dağ, 2014). Among these strategies are adopting a friendly language towards Islam (emphasizing its revolutionary character against oppression), establishing religion-based unions and foundations (such as the Union of Patriotic Imams of Kurdistan), nominating religious figures in the local and general elections (especially nominating female candidates wearing the hijab), and organizing conferences on religious matters.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ As I discussed in chapter four, the process of negotiating meaning involves various actors with diverse views and approaches. The founding leaders of the PKK started to promote a secular Kurdish ethnic identity in the late 1970s. As an initial strategy, it was an effective move. In order to muster support for their movement and communicate their perception of Kurdishness to the Kurdish masses, they strategically selected villages (where Alawite Kurds lived) as their propaganda sites. As a religious minority among the predominantly Sunni Kurds, Alawites were ideal targets. This strategy worked well and the PKK received significant support from the Alawite Kurds. However, when the Kurdish political elites started to develop a religious friendly language to muster support from the religious segments of the Kurds, Alawite Kurds within the Kurdish political movement took offense, and certain Kurdish Alawite foundations publicly criticized this “religious opening.” However, as Sarigil (2018) points out, due to the highly centralized structure of the Kurdish movement, these reactions from within the Kurdish ethnic group were easily absorbed by the leadership cadres.



Picture 7. 1. Erdogan is addressing Kurdish crowd during a 2015 campaign speech in Batman, a predominantly Kurdish province located in southeastern Turkey. Erdogan is showing the crowd a Kurdish translation of Qur'an that was published by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*), a public office that has been harshly criticized by Kurdish politicians for acting as a propaganda institution on behalf of the state.

For many religious supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP, this “religious opening” is satisfactory. They do not argue that Kurdish political entrepreneurs are religious, but they think that these elites have a sincere respect for religious practices of the Kurds. A religious supporter of the ruling HDP, a retired imam in Diyarbakir who previously voted for Islamist parties, uttered similar views:

Islam's basic message is justice. Allah in Qur'an clearly indicates the reason why he created human-beings belonging to different genders and peoples...⁵⁶ Kurdish people, unfortunately, have been the “orphan” child of the Islamic Ummah. Turks, Arabs, Persians, they did not show

⁵⁶ He recited the verse (49:13) in Arabic: “O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another.”

respect to the basic cultural and political rights of a people [the Kurds] that Allah created. The Kurdish politicians [the members of the HDP] are struggling for a people whose rights have been severely violated for many years... It is even a religious duty to side with them. No matter if they are personally religious or not. Besides, I personally know that they have great and sincere respect for Islam.

The ruling AKP and its president Erdogan developed counter arguments against the Kurdish political entrepreneurs' religious friendly discourses and practices, aimed to curtail any possible appeal that Kurdish entrepreneurs' religious friendly practices can have for the religious Kurds. For instance, in an election rally organized in Bingöl (a predominantly Kurdish populated province located in the East of Turkey) in 2011, Erdogan addressed a fervent Kurdish crowd:

These days, the BDP officials talk about religion.... Actually, they just abuse your religious beliefs. Since when have the BDP and the terrorist organization [the PKK] attached importance to this nation's religious values and beliefs? These circles have been insulting the nation's religious values. Because we have the upcoming elections, all of a sudden, they remembered religion and Islam.... Till yesterday, they were claiming that Kurds used to believe in and practice Zoroastrianism, and they say that Kurds were forced by sword to accept Islam.... I would also like to draw your attention to the following nonsense statements by their terrorist leader. May God forgive me but he made the following statements: "If God had existed, God would direct me to a wrong path. God is not for Kurds as well. God confuses and misdirects them. That is why I am my own God." Do you know who made these statements? Apo [Abdullah Öcalan] used these words in his books.... BDP officials consider him a prophet. Apo is not that modest. He sees himself as a god. There is even more. He also insults namaz by claiming that namaz is a theater play. These are all in his books.... They are not really religious. Be aware that they just try to abuse religion to gain your votes. You should know that they also martyred a state imam in Hakkari.... They also attacked Imam-Hatip schools [imam and preacher education institutions]

and their dormitories.... As you see, although they talk about religion, they continue to support terrorism (Quoted in Sarıgil, 2018).

In response to the AKP's discourse towards them, Kurdish entrepreneurs have consistently continued their religion friendly language. The leader of the pro-Kurdish HDP, who was jailed right after the failed military coup attempt in July 2016, responded to Erdogan's Zoroastrianism claims:

Among us [referring to their political movement] there are Christians, Armenians, Alawites and Sunnis. We are ordained [by Islam], there is no compulsion in religion and humiliation of other faiths... He [Erdogan] says, he does not discriminate against anyone, or he loves the created for the creator's sake, but right after, he says, "they are Zoroastrians." Zoroastrianism is an ancient faith, and currently there are practicing adherents of this faith [he asks respect for this community] ...his [Erdogan's) biggest hate is for the Kurds who stand firm against him.⁵⁷

These embracing discourses and practices, however, do not mean that they gave up the promotion of a secular form of Kurdish identity. They still promote this secular identity but with a religion friendly language. They developed an all-inclusive approach to religion, an approach that entails respect for all religious traditions among the Kurdish society including Sunni, Shia and Alawite Islam, Christianity, and some other marginal/small religious faiths. It must be noted, however, that the Kurdish political elites do not treat Islam as it is but aim to transform it to a cultural tradition that is stripped of its political dimension (Dağ, 2014, 2017). In other words, they aim to limit religion to the private sphere in order to contain the political dimension of Islam. As I will discuss in the next sections, I observed in the field that this point is very well conveyed to the members of the Kurdish ethnic group.

⁵⁷ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/demirtastan-cok-sert-sozler-40110597>

Secularization of Mind and Ethnic Identity

It must be noted that the divide between seculars and conservatives (pious) is one of the most significant political and social cleavages in Turkish society (Navaro-Yashin, 2002; White, 2002; Yavuz, 2009; Göle, 1997). As being part of this societal body, Kurdish people in Turkey reflect this divide as well. As we have seen so far, there are mainly two forms of Kurdish ethnic identity in relation to Islam. One is the secular ethnic identity that has been constructed and promoted by the Kurdish political entrepreneurs since the 1960s, an identity that does not include Islam as a defining attribute of Kurdishness. The second is the non-secular Kurdish ethnic identity that includes Islam as an inextricable component of Kurdishness, an identity that is promoted mainly by the Kurdish religious communities and the Islamist parties (including the ruling AKP). From the outset, it is possible to argue that the supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP demonstrate a secularization of mind and Kurdish identity. By secularization of mind I mean their clear understanding that Islam should be separated not just from the Kurdish identity but also from the political sphere. Even personally religious supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP adopt this view. In this part of the chapter, I will evaluate two hypotheses that can be derived from the analyses in the last two chapters.

A logical inference from what I have discussed so far would be that a positive relationship between support for the AKP and adopting a non-secular Kurdish ethnic identity perception is highly likely. As I will gauge this association with more precise measures later in this chapter, as a starting point, I assume that one can simply look at the religiosity of the respondents to see whether they adopt secular or non-secular ethnic identity form. It is simply logical to assume that secular (non-religious) Kurds are more likely to adopt a secular form of Kurdish ethnic identity, and religious Kurds are more likely to adopt a non-secular Kurdish

identity. In this sense, I hypothesize that the Kurds who support the AKP are more likely to be religious. In other words, I predict a positive and significant association between support for the ruling AKP and the degree of religiosity (as a measure of non-secular perception of Kurdishness).

All three surveys, including my own, indicate that the overwhelming majority of the Kurds who support the AKP are religious, as no respondent among the supporters of the AKP self-identified as atheist. Thus, we can infer from the results that supporting the AKP is positively associated with religiosity, that is, as I expected, those who support the AKP are more likely to adopt a form of non-secular Kurdish identity.

	Religiosity among the AKP's supporters (%)			
Survey year	Religious	Non-religious	Non-believer	No response
2014 November	90.52	8.62	—	0.86
2014 ⁵⁸ (May-July)	90.24	9.76	—	—
2010	89.18	7.79	—	3.3

Table 7. 2. Religiosity among the AKP's supporters according to three surveys conducted in different times.

As I have argued throughout this study, ethnic political elites who construct ethnic groups from ethnic categories are expected to put their followers on the same page in terms of political and cultural demands (as I discussed in the chapter four) as well as identity perception. Thus, I hypothesize a positive relationship between support for the pro-Kurdish HDP and adopting secular form of Kurdish ethnic identity.

⁵⁸ My own survey.

It is reasonable to assume that secular Kurds are expected to have a secular perception of Kurdish identity. Thus, I predict that voting for the pro-Kurdish HDP is strongly associated with a secular world-view as an indicator of secular Kurdish identity. In other words, secular Kurds may be expected to share the secular perception of Kurdish ethnic identity constructed by the Kurdish ethnic entrepreneurs. As table 7. 2. and table 7. 3. show, the percentage of the secular supporters of the HDP (non-religious + non-believers) are much higher than the AKP's. Thus, it is reasonable to argue that these secular supporters of the HDP adopt secular Kurdish identity that has been constructed and promoted by the Kurdish political elites.

	Religiosity among the HDP's supporters (%)			
Survey year	Religious	Non-religious	Non-believer	No response
2014 November	70.06	25.82	3.27	0.65
2014 (may-July)	66.34	25.74	7.92	—
2010	65.12	32.74	1.42	0.71

Table 7. 3. Religiosity among the HDP's supporters according to three surveys conducted in different times.

More Precise evidence for the Arguments

However, the Kurdish reality is more complicated than this, and thus to evaluate Kurds' political behavior requires more precise and direct measures. The Kurds who vote for the ruling AKP are predominantly religious and the party has a very weak appeal among the secular Kurds. The pro-Kurdish HDP, on the other hand, has a very strong appeal among the secular Kurds. However, as Table 3 indicates, it is also a fact that the HDP has a significant appeal among the religious Kurds as well. Recent studies focusing on the connection between religiosity and

support for the Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements have produced conflicting outcomes. While some have argued that there is not a statistically significant negative relationship between religiosity and support for particular Kurdish political parties (Sarigil, 2018; Sarigil & Fazlıoğlu, 2013), others, for example Ekmekçi (2011), have found that “Kurds who are more religious and more satisfied with Turkish democracy have a lower likelihood of supporting Kurdish ethno-nationalist parties than those who are less religious and less satisfied with Turkish democracy”) (p. 1615). In this study however, I indicate that religiosity of the Kurds should be evaluated not as a separate factor but together with their perceptions of Kurdish ethnic identity.

As Table 7. 3. indicates, a significant portion of the supporters of the Pro-Kurdish HDP are religious, suggesting that the party’s “religious opening” has resonated well among the pious Kurds. I personally observed this resonance in the field as well. One of my respondents, who described himself as religious and had previously voted for the AKP, reported that he decided to vote for the pro-Kurdish HDP because the party changed his position on religion: “I come from a conservative [religious] family, the majority of whom have traditionally supported Islamist parties. I myself also voted for the AKP in the past but now I support the HDP because the party represents me best.” When asked, he further stated that he found the party’s religious opening convincing because it consistently nominated religious figures in the local and general elections: “At the beginning I had suspicions about the HDP’s approach to Islam. I took it with a caution, but in the process, I realized that they are sincere. As we see, over the years they have consistently nominated many religious candidates” (Interview Diyarbakir July 2015).

Such responses raised certain questions. Do these religious Kurds who vote for the pro-Kurdish political party adopt secular or non-secular perceptions of Kurdish identity? Is there a difference, however subtle or indefinable, between the religious Kurds who vote for the ruling

AKP and the religious Kurds who vote for the pro-Kurdish political party in terms of their perceptions of ethnic identity?

In order to answer these questions, I designed a new survey questionnaire with a prompt in the form of a dialogue between two friends. Prompt dialogues can be useful in measuring ethnicity or identity-related issues by creating suitable and uniform contexts for the respondents, making it easy for them to formulate their responses (Posner, 2005). I composed this fictitious dialogue based on my observations and informal interviews in the field and my experiences as an insider. In a tape-recorded discussion, two friends, Ali and Mizgin, are exchanging views on how they perceive their Kurdish identity in relation to Islam. While Ali stresses that he sees Kurdishness and Islam as inseparable and Islam as a significant defining attribute of his Kurdishness, Mizgin argues otherwise and stresses that she sees Islam and Kurdishness as two different entities. After listening to this fictitious discussion, respondents were asked questions about the dialogue, including the opinion that they supported. I consider those who agreed with Ali as having a non-secular Kurdish identity perception and those who agreed with Mizgin as having a secular Kurdish ethnic identity.

The party preferences of my survey informants, like other nationally representative surveys, indicate that they mainly expressed support for two political parties, the pro-Kurdish HDP and the ruling AKP. These two political parties are the two main competitors for the Kurdish vote. The main secularist and Kemalist opposition party CHP⁵⁹ has a Kurdish support base as well, but it is much smaller than those of the HDP and AKP. Thus, my analysis will

⁵⁹ CHP, the main opposition party, is also a secular political party. There has been an increase in its vote shares among the secular Kurds since 2010. This can be explained by the fact that an Alawite Kurd, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, has been the president of the party since 2010.

cover only the identity perceptions of the Kurds who expressed support for the HDP and the AKP. Table 7. 4. shows party preferences of my survey informants.

Party	Number of respondents (N=288)	Percentage
AKP	123	42.71
CHP	25	8.68
BDP/HDP ⁶⁰	101	35.07
MHP	3	1.04
Other	19	6.60
Won't vote	17	5.90

Table 7. 4. Party vote shares among the informants of the survey conducted in summer 2014.

As indicated above, I expected to see a positive relationship between supporting the ruling AKP and perception of Kurdish identity as non-secular, and a positive relationship between support for the pro-Kurdish HDP and perception Kurdish ethnic identity as secular. In other words, those who adopted politically active forms of ethnic identification (form 1 and form 2) were expected to be on the same page with the Kurdish political elites in terms of perception of Kurdish identity as secular, and those who supported the ruling AKP were expected to perceive Kurdish identity as non-secular.

My survey results indicate that out of 101 respondents who expressed support for the pro-Kurdish party, 82.18% regarded Kurdish identity as secular, meaning that a large majority of these respondents to my survey were on the same page with the Kurdish political entrepreneurs.

⁶⁰ When I conducted this survey in 2014, the BDP was in place. As I discussed in the second chapter, the HDP replaced the BDP in 2015. Thus, I use the names of both political parties here to eliminate any potential confusions.

Only 12.87% adopted a non-secular Kurdish identity, and 4.95% stayed neutral. This evidence supports my prediction of a positive relationship between support for the pro-Kurdish HDP and adopting a secular Kurdish ethnic identity and indicate that ethnic groupness in the Kurdish case refers to a common ground between Kurdish political entrepreneurs and their supporters in terms of political and cultural demands (chapter four) as well as perception of identity.

On the other hand, out of 123 respondents who expressed support for the ruling AKP, 78.05% adopted a non-secular Kurdish identity, and 13.82% a secular Kurdish identity, while 8.13% remained neutral on this question. Thus, there is evidence of a positive relationship between voting for the ruling AKP and adopting a non-secular Kurdish ethnic identity. As I indicated in the first section of this chapter, religious communities and the leader of the ruling AKP emphasize the strong ties between Islam and Kurdish identity, which has resonated very well among the supporters of the ruling party. The survey results therefore indicate a very clear variance between the supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP and those of the ruling AKP in terms of their perception of Kurdishness in relation to Islam. Table 7. 5. shows this clear difference between the supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP and the ruling AKP in terms of their perceptions of Kurdish identity.

	secular Kurdish identity	non-secular Kurdish identity	not sure
AKP	13.82% (N=17)	78.05% (N=96)	8.13% (N=10)
BDP/HDP	82.18% (N=83)	12.87% (N=13)	4.95% (N=5)

Table 7. 5. Identity perceptions of the supporters of the HDP and the AKP.

But when religious Kurds' perceptions of Kurdish ethnic identity are examined, a different picture emerges. The data indicate that only half of those in this category (53.62%) adopt non-secular Kurdish ethnic identity, and a significant percentage of them (36.71%) adopt secular Kurdish ethnic identity. Thus, looking only at the personal religiosity of the Kurds does not make it possible to accurately predict the identity perceptions they adopt. However, the picture becomes clearer when these religious individuals are distributed across their party preferences. Out of 207 respondents who were religious, 53.61% expressed support for the ruling AKP and 32.37% for the pro-Kurdish HDP. Accordingly, I now examine how the religious supporters of each party perceive their ethnic identity in relation to Islam.

To start with the ruling AKP, Among the supporters of the ruling AKP (N=123), 90.24% (N=111) respondents self-identified as religious. Among these 111 religious respondents who expressed support for the ruling AKP, 78.38% adopted non-secular Kurdish ethnic identity, whereas only 12.61% of this category adopted secular Kurdish identity. In the field, I gathered semi-structured interview data to delve more into this issue. Among my interviewees, I observed two categories of religious supporters of the ruling-AKP. The first and overwhelmingly largest category believes that Islam is a significant defining attribute of the Kurdish ethnic identity as I expected. As one of my informants who falls into this category said:

When I hear the term Kurd, always Islam comes to my mind. Kurdish culture and Islam have been closely intertwined. I, like Ali [referring to the fictitious character in the prompt dialogue], cannot think of a Kurdishness without Islam. I can even take one step further and argue that someone who does not pray five times a day cannot truly be a Kurd....When for the first time, I saw a Kurd who was consuming an alcoholic drink, I was deeply shocked. To me, Kurds would never drink alcohol as Islam forbids it.... Unfortunately, the PKK and Kurdish political parties

spread leftist ideologies among the Kurds. So, now you come across many Kurds who are not religious.

These people generally have daily social interactions with the Turks who share same political and religious preferences. They socialize together by going to similar cafes, mosques, tea parties, religious study circles, and weddings; watching similar TV channels; and reading similar newspapers. Thus, it is possible to argue that their Kurdishness is more of a cultural phenomenon that is stripped of a political dimension. In other words, they adopt politically passive forms of ethnic identification. Yet, religion has a political dimension, shaping their political preferences.

I noticed a second category within the supporters of the AKP, when the following views came out of an interview:

Islam has significantly shaped the Kurdish culture, but it cannot be seen as a part of Kurdish identity. I feel closer to Ali but with a slightly different perspective. Islam is a higher identity. It cannot be part of any ethnic or national identities but nations and ethnic groups can be part of it. It is like an umbrella that covers all nations and identities. Under that umbrella nations or other identities have no importance. Ali is right when he says he cannot conceive of Kurdishness without Islam but wrong when he claims that Islam is a part of Kurdishness... My faith is more important than my ethnic identity. I am first Muslim, then a Kurd.

A previous study focusing on the members of the Kurdish Islamic groups also found a similar approach among the Kurdish informants. Answering an interview question concerning this distinction, a significant number of informants who were selected through a snowball method stated that their faith was more important than their ethnic identity (Gürses 2015).

The picture is quite different and surprising when we look at the identity perceptions of the religious supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP. Out of 101 respondents who expressed support for the pro-Kurdish political party, 66.34% (N=67) self-identified as religious. Among these 67

religious respondents who expressed support for the HDP, 74.63% (N=50) adopted secular Kurdish ethnic identity, whereas only 17.91% of this category adopted non-secular Kurdish identity. These respondents were personally religious yet did not consider Islam as a defining element of the Kurdish ethnic identity, an idea that has been promoted by the Kurdish political elites, meaning that the Kurdish political elites and their religious supporters, to great extent, are on the same page in terms of perception of ethnic identity even though these supporters are personally religious. Religiosity, thus, is a good indicator to predict whether someone adopt secular or non-secular perception of Kurdish identity for the supporters of the AKP but it is a poor one when it comes to the supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP. Table 7. 6. shows the clear difference between the supporters of the both parties in terms of their perceptions of Kurdish identity.

	secular Kurdish identity	non-secular Kurdish identity	not sure
AKP	12.61% (N=14)	78.38% (N=87)	9.01% (N=10)
BDP/HDP	74.63% (N=50)	17.91% (N=12)	7.46% (N=5)

Table 7. 6. The identity perceptions of the religious supporters of the HDP and the AKP.

In-depth interviews with this category of informants, however, reveal striking findings. First of all, it is possible to argue that they view Islam as a more of cultural and personal/private issue, something that has nothing to do with the political. This position recurrently emerged in many interviews, as the following quote from my interview with one of the religious supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP strikingly reveals way:

My faith is between me and Allah and has nothing to do with my Kurdishness. Religion is about my personal connection with Allah. It should not be used as a political tool... The ruling party is using Islam to silence Kurdish political and cultural demands... Unfortunately, they successfully deceive many Kurds. Demanding our [the Kurd's] cultural and political rights is completely compatible with Islam... Even without Islam, Kurdishness would have a very strong value for me. As I said, my faith is between me and Allah and has nothing to do with ethnic identity and politics.

Here, this informant makes a distinction between the personal/private and the political and thinks that religion should belong to the personal realm. This is a striking point for two reasons. First, the role of religion has been a contested issue in the Turkish political landscape since its inception in 1923. The secular Kemalist regime aimed to limit religion to the private sphere in order to contain Islamist political activities (White, 2002; Navaro-Yashin, 2002; Tuğal, 2009; Turam, 2006; Yavuz, 2009; Cizre-Sakallıoğlu, 1994). Those in the religious segments of Turkish society have always been against this secularist policy and viewed Islam as a comprehensive way of life that regulates not just the personal or the social but the political as well (Yavuz, 2003). The Kurdish political elites' emphasis on the notion of "cultural Islam," which implies that Islam has nothing to do with politics, has parallels with the Kemalist's secularization efforts. Second, what is particularly striking here is that someone who is personally religious has this secular understanding of religion. He not only separates Islam from the cultural content of the Kurdish identity, but also separates it from the political realm. In this sense, he shares the notion of cultural Islam promoted by the Kurdish political entrepreneurs.

Other informants raised some other interesting ideas as well. A teacher working at a religious high school (*İmam Hatip Lisesi*) voiced the following interesting opinion regarding Islam and Kurdish identity:

I am religious but not religionist (*Dindarım ama dinci değilim*). I am a Muslim but not an Islamist (*Müslümanım ama İslamcı değilim*). These are different things. The major concern of Religionists or Islamists is to reach political power. So, they use Islam for their political interests. Islam is not the religion they think it is. It as a private and personal matter, [and] there is no reason to think that it is a defining part of Kurdishness. In this sense, I see no connection between my Kurdish identity and my faith... The devotion of the Kurds to Islam has been badly abused by Islamists for decades but it is enough...Islamists [referring to the ruling party] extensively talk about ummah when dealing with the Kurdish issue. They ignore our basic political rights but speak about the unity of the Islamic ummah. How can you establish an Islamic ummah if some parts of it lack cultural and political rights?

Separation of Islam from ethnic identity and the political realm seems to be a common position among the supporters of the Kurdish political elites. Islam's supranational political notions such as the idea of ummah has no or weak appeal among the supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP. An informant, a supporter of the pro-Kurdish HDP, astutely expressed this view:

Running after the unity of ummah or brotherhood in ummah is nonsense or even *haram* while your people is being denied basic political and cultural rights. It is a religious obligation to work for your own people's sake. Religion does not prevent people from fighting for their rights. On the contrary, it encourages believers to rise up against oppression. It is a religious duty for us to stand by the Kurdish politicians who bravely struggle for the rights of the Kurdish people. I can say that those who excessively talk about ummah almost always want Kurds to be subordinated to other nations.

The notion of "cultural Islam" seems to be widely shared by the supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP (religious or secular). However, among my informants who expressed support for the pro-Kurdish party expressed some other interesting opinions. Some of them stated that they support the HDP just because they have no better options, a stance resembling that of the Hungarians

living in Romania as reported in Brubaker's (2002) study. They also stated that they voted for the pro-Hungarian political party simply because they had no other option. When asked about his political party preference, an informant expressed:

Unwillingly the HDP (*kerhen HDP*)....I vote for the HDP not because I feel closer to them but because there is no better alternative. I do not support the AKP because their Islamic approach is not sincere and very much mixed with Turkish nationalism. I do not find the HDP sincere either when it comes to religion. However, they are sincere in struggling for the rights of the Kurds.

That's why, I support this party.

Based on my field observations and data gathered through interviews, it is possible to argue that even religious followers of the pro-Kurdish HDP adopt a secular mindset in terms of ethnic identity and religion. In accordance with the Kurdish political elites, they tend to see religion as a cultural or private phenomenon that is separate from politics and Kurdish ethnic identity. Thus, the supra-national political implications or notions of Islam have no or limited effect on the majority of the Kurdish ethnic group that has been constructed by the Kurdish political elites. In this sense, Kurdish political elites and their supporters, to a great extent, are on the same page in terms of their perceptions of Kurdish identity as secular, ruling out Islam from the cultural content of Kurdish identity.

This notion of cultural Islam or an Islam that pertains to the personal/private sphere is a significant issue. The secularization of mind or ethnic identity among the supporters of the pro-Kurdish political party can be seen as a function of groupness. Kurdish ethnic political elites have promoted this idea of "cultural Islam" since the beginning of the new millennium as part of their "religious opening" (Dağ 2017, 2014; Sarıgil 2018; Gürses 2018). It seems that there is a common ground between the ethnic political elites and their supporters. In my survey, I also asked respondents whether they felt an intimacy with all Kurds, religious, non-religious or

atheist, based on a related part in the prompt dialogue. My objective with this question was to understand how party preference affected the answers given. Since I considered those who supported pro-Kurdish HDP as members of the Kurdish ethnic group, I was expecting them to have a stronger sense of unity or togetherness than those who supported non-ethnic political parties.

The results for this question indicated that the overwhelming majority of the Kurds who adopted a politically active form of ethnic identification (the supporters of the HDP), namely the members of the Kurdish ethnic group, felt affinity with all Kurds regardless of their level of religiosity. Out of 101 respondents who fall in this category, 80.20% agreed with the fictitious character in the prompt dialogue who says “I have a strong fellow feeling with all Kurds irrespective of their religious beliefs,” whereas 18.81% of this category disagreed with the statement.

However, those who supported the ruling AKP largely (78.86%) disagreed with the statement. Only, 13.01% of this category agreed with the statement. Interestingly, even if the related survey question does not mention any parties, some informants, who expressed support for the ruling AKP explicitly stated that they did not feel any intimacy with the Kurds who support the Kurdish political movements (the PKK and the pro-Kurdish political parties). They were eager to stress their distaste for these ethno-nationalist movements and their supporters. On the other hand, the majority of those who expressed support for the pro-Kurdish party felt intimacy with the Kurds no matter if they were religious, non-religious or atheist. Being a Kurds is a sufficient reason for them to feel intimacy with someone. Thus, it is possible to argue that a sense of togetherness or unity is much stronger among the supporters of the pro-Kurdish HDP than those of the ruling AKP. This point also is a good indicator for sense of groupness.

It is again a striking point that even the religious supporters of these two parties significantly differ on this issue. Among the religious supporters of the HDP, 71.64% agreed with the statement and 26.87% disagreed. Although the percentage of the religious Kurds who have strong fellow feeling with all Kurds irrespective of their religious beliefs, is almost 10% lower than the general percentage of the supporters of the HDP, it is still considerably high. It seems that the religiosity of the supporters of the HDP is a primarily personal matter. However, the majority of the supporters of the AKP 80.18% disagreed with the statement. Only, 11.71% expressed strong fellow feeling with all Kurds no matter if they are religious, non-religious or atheist. Here, they significantly differ again. Table 7. 7. indicates this clear variance between the religious supporters of both parties on this issue.

	agreed	disagreed	not sure
AKP	11.71% (N=13)	80.18% (N=89)	8.11% (N=9)
BDP/HDP	71.64% (N=48)	26.87 (N=18)	1.49% (N=1)

Table 7. 7. The percentage of responses given by the religious supporters of both parties to the statement: “I have a strong fellow feeling with all Kurds irrespective of their religious beliefs.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, I first discussed counter discourses proposed by various actors –i.e., Naqshbandi orders, the state and the ruling AKP, in the process of negotiating the meaning of the Kurdish identity against the Kurdish ethnic entrepreneurs. I examined how a non-secular Kurdish identity perception proposed against the secular Kurdish identity perception that has been constructed and promoted by the Kurdish political elites. Second, I tested a couple of hypotheses that I derived from the theoretical framework I develop in chapter four. As part of this endeavor,

I indicated that there is a clear variance between the supporters of the ruling AKP and the those of the HDP in terms of ethnic identity perception (secular versus non-secular) they adopt.

Kurdish political elites and their supporters are on the same page in terms of adopting a secular ethnic identity perception that rules out religion from the cultural content of the Kurdish identity, something that is a function of ethnic groupness based on my conception of the term. Overall, I indicated that the members of the Kurdish ethnic group (those who support the pro-Kurdish HDP) are mainly on the same page with the ethnic political elites in terms of both ethnic identity perception as well as political and cultural demands.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

The Kurdish issue in Turkey has generated one of the most violent ethnic conflicts in the world. Over the course of the last forty years, more than 40,000 people have been killed in the armed conflicts between the PKK and the Turkish security forces. Although the root causes of the Kurdish issue date back to the nineteenth century, the last century of the Ottoman Empire, the current manifestation of the conflict took shape after the 1980s. Despite the presence of certain predisposing factors—i.e., high ethnic polarization, violent ethnic clashes, and a large ethnic population—a significant number of Kurds do not support the pro-Kurdish political parties that are struggling for certain Kurdish political and cultural rights. Since this is the case, why, we might ask, did a large portion of the Kurdish population vote for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in recent elections? In this sense, Kurdish political behavior in Turkey presents an empirical puzzle. Empirical puzzles or deviant cases are thought to be conducive to theoretical and methodological innovations (George & Bennett, 2005) because they generally motivate us to explore black boxes or omitted variables in the study of ethnicity.

This study has addressed the following research questions:

- What significant differences can be identified between the Kurds who support pro-Kurdish political parties and those who support non-ethnic political parties in terms of their political and cultural demands?
- How do Kurds who prefer non-ethnic political parties differ from those who support pro-Kurdish political parties in terms of their perceptions of ethnic identity?

Ethnic Category, Ethnic Group, and Four Ethnic Identification Forms

To this end I have developed a new conceptual model based on a significant conceptual distinction made by Brubaker (2002) between ethnic category and ethnic group. Building on this significant conceptual distinction, this new conceptual model may help us understand, first, what ethnic category and ethnic group empirically refer to, and second, the relationship between ethnic category and ethnic group from both macro and micro perspectives. I suggest that ethnic identities and the forms they take among ethnic members can be observed mainly in two societal domains: social space and political space. In social space individuals carry out daily routines and activities that generally have nothing to do with politics, which include speaking their native language and adhering to local clothing styles, customs, and traditions. In other words, social space, as I use the term here, contains all non-political activities of individuals such as speaking ethnic languages, wearing ethnic clothing patterns, practicing ethnic customs, and maintaining traditions. In political space as defined here, on the other hand, they conduct or participate in political activities, which may be formal (e.g., voting for ethnic political parties, running on an ethnic party's ticket) or informal (e.g., joining ethnic armed organizations, providing logistical support for guerilla groups). I also suggest that a given ethnic identity can be active or passive in these domains for a given ethnic individual. Thus, I propose that an ethnic identity can take four different forms among members of any ethnic category:

- 1) socially and politically active,
- 2) socially passive but politically active,
- 3) socially active but politically passive, and
- 4) socially and politically passive.

I have further suggested that all those who adopt any one of these four forms of identity constitute the whole of an ethnic category in a specific setting, but only those who adopt politically active forms of ethnic identification (form 1 and form 2) constitute an ethnic group. In this sense, an ethnic group is a subset of an ethnic category in terms of the composition of the members. I also argue that each of these forms of ethnic identification is strongly correlated with certain ethnic political and cultural demands.

In light of this conceptual model, I have demonstrated that the terms ethnic category and ethnic group refer to different phenomena in the Kurdish case. A significant percentage of the Kurdish ethnic category do not join the Kurdish ethnic group by supporting the pro-Kurdish political parties. They adopt either socially active but politically passive or socially and politically passive ethnic identification forms. There are certain identifiable differences between the Kurds who support the pro-Kurdish political parties and those who support non-ethnic political parties in terms of ethnic political demands. I have shown that the Kurds who support the pro-Kurdish political parties, namely the members of the Kurdish ethnic group, are more likely to support the political demands that Kurdish political elites raise and promote such as the constitutional recognition of Kurdish identity and lowering the high electoral threshold. The Kurds who support non-ethnic political parties (the ruling AKP), on the other hand, are unlikely to support political demands that ethnic political elites raise and promote. These two groups, however, do not differ in terms of cultural demands.

Secular and Non-secular Kurdish Identity Perceptions

In order to address my second research question, I have proposed a contingent theoretical argument to explicate the relationship between ethnicity and religion in Muslim societies that, I

believe, sheds light not only on the interaction between ethnicity and religion in the Kurdish case, but also on how ethnicity and religion interact in Muslim majority societies in general.

As previous research has documented, ethnic category members do not perceive ethnic identity homogenously, especially in terms of the cultural content of their ethnic identities (Abdelal et al., 2006; Waters, 1990). Simply put, ethnic identity might mean different things to different ethnic category members. This has broad implications in the empirical domain, but I have dealt with only one dimension, that is, how ethnic members relate to ethnic identity in tandem with religion and how this relationship, under some conditions, may affect political behavior. I have basically argued that ethnic category members in Muslim societies perceive ethnic identity in relation to religion in one of two potential ways. First, some members adopt what I call a *secular ethnic identity*, which dissociates religion from the cultural content of ethnic identity. This modality of ethnic identity rejects religion as a constitutive element of ethnic identity and defines ethnic identity based on non-religious cultural elements such as language, myths of common origin, or tribal ties. Second, other ethnic category members adopt what I call a *non-secular ethnic identity*, which views religion as an inextricable component of ethnic identity together with the non-religious cultural elements. For those who adopt this understanding, ethnic identity has sacred meaning. I argue that these two understandings play significant roles in ethnic group formation and, under some conditions, may shape reactions of ethnic members to emerging ethnic groups in Muslim societies.

I have empirically illustrated that the Kurds who support the pro-Kurdish political parties, unlike the Kurds who prefer non-ethnic political parties, adopt a secular Kurdish-ethnic identity that excludes Islam from the cultural content of Kurdishness, a perception of Kurdishness that has been constructed and promoted by the Kurdish political elites since the 1960s. The Kurds

who support the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), on the other hand, are more likely to adopt a non-secular Kurdish ethnic identity that views Islam as a significant defining element of Kurdish ethnic identity. Thus, I have argued and shown that the members of the Kurdish ethnic group in Turkey, namely the supporters of the pro-Kurdish political parties, unlike those Kurds who support non-ethnic political parties, are more likely to be on the same page with the Kurdish political elites in terms of both ethnic political demands and the perceptions of Kurdishness.

Contributions and Implications of the Study

The findings of this dissertation have broad theoretical and policy relevance. Recent studies in the literature of ethnicity have shifted their analytical focus from macro level ethnicity to individual level ethnicity (Brubaker, 2002; Kanchan Chandra, 2004; J Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Keyes, 1981; Posner, 2005; Wimmer, 2002, 2008). As an outcome, new conceptual and theoretical tools have been developed in order to understand ethnicity on the ground. This dissertation contributes to these theoretical and conceptual endeavors by theorizing and empiricising the nexus between ethnic category and ethnic group from both macro and micro levels. Although Brubaker's objective in making the distinction between these two terms is to propose ethnicity without groups, my findings indicate that ethnic groups are significant analytical categories and, thus, should be kept in use. The distinction between ethnic category and ethnic group, in this sense, does not undermine the importance of the analytical utility of the term ethnic group but, quite the contrary, indicates its usefulness in theoretical and empirical analysis. This dissertation also empirically indicates, following Brubaker's suggestion, that ethnic groupness should not be taken as a given and fixed phenomenon but as something variable or in process.

Second, the extant literature measures the saliency of ethnic identities on group level and focuses solely on the political saliency of identities on a macro level. For instance, in a place where there is an ethnic political party with a considerable base of support or an insurgent ethnic organization maintaining a war against political authorities, that particular ethnic identity is considered to be politically salient. However, this macro level approach runs the risk of ignoring the fact that a significant portion, or even the majority of the members of that ethnic category might not adopt a politically salient ethnic identity form on the individual level, as I demonstrated in the case of the Kurds of Turkey, a case that for many reasons may make us think quite the opposite. Hence, combining macro and individual levels of analysis is conducive to more accurate empirical outcomes.

Thus, my conceptual model reveals two significant empirical puzzles that for the most part are unacknowledged in the extant literature. The most significant empirical puzzle refers to those who adopt a socially active (strong ethnic attachment) but politically passive (no support for pro-ethnic political organizations) ethnic identification form. This category of ethnic members, despite their strong attachment to their ethnic backgrounds, disassociates itself from ethnic nationalist political organizations that claim to fight for the rights of the ethnic category. In the Kurdish case, as I demonstrated, the percentage of those who adopt this form of ethnic identification is quite significant. The second empirical puzzle comprises those who adopt a politically active (support for pro-ethnic political organizations) but socially passive (weak or no ethnic attachment) ethnic identification form. Previous researchers have considered support for ethnonationalist organizations as an indicator of “identity hardening” and defection from these organizations as a measure for “identity softening” (Kalyvas, 2008). However, my findings indicate that support for or disassociation from ethnic political organizations does not always

refer to identity hardening or softening, as these two ethnic identification forms indicate.

The project also significantly contributes to studies of Turkish politics for two important reasons. First, previous work on Kurdish issues in Turkey has generally focused attention on the historical underpinnings and growth of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. As a result, these studies exclusively focus on those Kurds who embrace nationalist sentiments and rally around ethnic nationalist organizations, including the PKK, Kurdish civil society organizations, and Kurdish political parties (Aras, 2013; Güneş, 2012; McDowall, 1996; Özcan, 2006; Romano, 2006b; Watts, 2010), while ignoring the fact that a significant number of the Kurds prefer to abstain from nationalist Kurdish organizations. This project fills in this gap by probing not only the motivations, ethnic identity perceptions, and political and cultural demands of nationalist Kurds but also those of the Kurds who distance themselves from nationalist organizations. Thus, this research, with its comparative research design, constructs a more accurate picture of Kurdish electoral politics in Turkey. Second, previous work on Kurds of Turkey generally does not locate the issue in broader theoretical perspectives, which hinders both empirical contributions that the case might make to the theoretical literature and the ability of the extant theoretical frameworks to explain the dynamics of Kurdish ethnic politics. This project, therefore, helps to fill this significant but long ignored gap between the realities of Kurdish electoral politics and the corpus of existing theoretical literature on ethnic political behavior.

Looking at this study from a policy point of view, I have suggested an answer to two obvious political questions: Why, on the one hand, do a significant portion of the Kurdish population in Turkey not support the pro-Kurdish political parties? Looked at from another perspective, why, as a generally culturally conservative population, do the Kurds not overwhelmingly support the Islamically-oriented Justice and Development Party? The policy

implications are obvious—for Kurdish political actors, for the Turkish government, and for outsiders with a stake in Turkish political affairs.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

One of the major limitations of single-case studies is that findings derived from them may not be generalized to other cases. I believe that my conceptual model can be applied to all ethnic cases, but the size of the puzzling ethnic identification form (socially active but politically passive form) may not be as significant in other cases as it is in the Kurdish case. It is the norm that in violent ethnic conflicts ethnic members tend to support their co-ethnics by adopting politically active ethnic identification forms. As Kalyvas (2008) indicates, there are people who defect from their co-ethnics in ethnic civil wars, but the examples he provides refer to groups of negligible size. What makes the Kurdish case an empirical puzzle, however, is that those who prefer to abstain from pro-Kurdish political parties or organizations constitute a significant percentage of the total number of Kurds.

Second, I collected my survey data in Istanbul, a metropolitan center occupied by people from different ethnic categories. My findings regarding the association between ethnic identity perceptions (secular versus non-secular) and political party preferences may not apply to predominantly Kurdish populated provinces of Turkey. The “norm of reciprocity” or the homogenizing impact of possible mistreatment of local people by the state authorities may affect this association in predominantly Kurdish populated regions. Although I conducted 22 in-depth interviews in Diyarbakir, a pre-dominantly Kurdish city that is the stronghold of Kurdish activism in Turkey, this point needs further empirical investigations.

Since I conducted field research in 2014 and 2015, Turkey has undergone through significant political and social processes, including the intensifying conflict between the AKP government and the Gülen Movement, the failed coup attempt in 2016 that was allegedly initiated and planned by Gülen movement, and the consequent vanishing of the relatively liberal ambience in terms of political and cultural rights. Moreover, the AKP's electoral alliances with the Nationalist Movement Party in presidential elections and imprisonment of the Kurdish deputies have radically changed the Turkish political landscape in terms of Kurdish issue, something that may have impact on the outcomes of similar projects. Future research should take these significant variables into account.

Appendix

Prompt Dialogue

Ali: Hi! How are you doing?

Mizgin: Fine, thanks. How about you?

Ali: Fine, thanks. Nothing to complain about.

Mizgin: So, what's up? You seem kind of concerned about something.

Ali: Well, actually yes. I've been thinking about recent discussions about the Kurds.

Mizgin: Like what?

Ali: About religious and non-religious Kurds. On the news they often make this distinction between religious and non-religious Kurds when they're talking about their voting behavior. These debates and discussions got me to thinking about my own personal perception of Kurdishness.

Mizgin: I know what you mean. I come across such discussions a lot too. So what particular issue concerns you most?

Ali: I am mostly thinking about the relationship between Islam and Kurdishness, or what being Kurdish means to me in relation to Islam.

Mizgin: So, what do you think?

Ali: As a Kurd, I view Islam an inextricable component of Kurdishness. To me, Islam is a very significant component of Kurdish identity.

Mizgin: That's interesting. I am sorry, though, but I think differently. As a Kurd, I consider Islam and Kurdishness as two different identities. I mean they refer to different things for me. So, Islam is not a component of my Kurdishness. For me the main defining elements of Kurdishness are just the Kurdish language and customs. Faith or religion has nothing to do with it.

Ali: I respect your thoughts. However, to me Islam and Kurdishness are closely intertwined. Without Islam, my Kurdishness loses its meaning or value and becomes something foreign to me. I cannot embrace a Kurdishness detached from Islam.

Mizgin: I understand what you're saying, but personally, I don't see any relationship between the two things. They are separate identities. Kurdishness is a worldly identity, whereas Islam is about the afterlife. Thus, to me, my Kurdishness is independent of Islam. If we define

Kurdishness based on religious faith, what will happen to those Kurds who adopt different faiths than Islam? Are we going to deny their Kurdishness?

Ali: Of course not. I don't judge others' Kurdishness, nor do I any right to do so. I am just telling you what I feel, not defining Kurdishness for all. It's just that when I am thinking about my own Kurdishness, I see that Islam is an inextricable element of it. Without Islam, Kurdishness has no or little meaning for me.

Mizgin: I see, but as I said, my Kurdish identity has a great value for me independent of religion. For me, these two identities should not be mixed. They refer to different things for me.

Ali: One other point, you mentioned other Kurds a moment ago. Do you feel kinship with other Kurds regardless of their religious faiths? I mean whatever their faith might be?

Mizgin: Yes, definitely. If somebody is a Kurd, I feel sympathy and intimacy with that person, no matter if they are religious, non-religious or atheist. I have a strong fellow feeling with all Kurds irrespective of their religious beliefs.

Ali: Well, for me, it is not enough to feel affinity with someone just because he or she is a Kurd. I need to see if they also share my faith. I can't say I feel any affection toward non-religious or atheist Kurds.

Mizgin: Well, we don't have to agree on these issues. You have your views and I have mine. I suppose that is what freedom of speech is all about. Thank you very much for this great conversation.

Ali: It is good to see there is something we can agree on. Thank you very much. It was a very interesting conversation.

Survey Questionnaire

Date of interview:

District:

1. Age:

18-28____ 29-43____ 44 and up____

2. Gender:

Female____ Male____

3. What is the highest grade you have finished in your education?

illiterate____ primary school____ middle school____ high School____ college and higher____

4. How much do you earn per month?

301-700 TL b) 701-1200 TL c) 1201-2000 TL d) 2001-3000 TL d) 3001 and up

5. Do you support a political party? Which party?

AKP____ CHP____ BDP____ MHP____ other____ won't vote ____

Now I am going to play a tape recording of a conversation between two friends. Please listen carefully to the conversation. Afterwards, I will ask you for your opinion about some of the views that the two friends expressed.

6. In their discussion, Ali said that he considered Islamic faith as an inextricable component of his Kurdishness. Do you share this view?

yes____ no____ not sure____

7. Ali said that he has no affection toward Kurds who are non-religious or followers of other faiths. Do you share this view?

yes____ no____ not sure____

8. Mizgin said that Islam and Kurdishness are two different things. Kurdishness is a worldly identity but Islam is about the afterlife, so, Islam has nothing to do with Kurdishness. Do you agree with Mizgin?

yes ____ no ____ not sure ____

9. Mizgin said that he feels affinity with all Kurds, no matter if they are religious or secular/non-religious. Do you share this view?

yes ____ no ____ not sure ____

10. Which political party do you think Ali would support?

AKP ____ CHP ____ HDP ____ MHP ____ not sure ____

11. Which political party do you think Mizgin would support?

AKP ____ CHP ____ HDP ____ MHP ____ not sure ____

12. Some people these days are demanding that Kurdish identity must be constitutionally recognized. Do you think this would be a good idea?

Yes ____ No ____ not sure ____

13. Some people these days are demanding that 10% electoral threshold should be abolished. Do you think this would be a good idea?

Yes ____ No ____ not sure ____

14. Should the government contribute to the improvement of Kurdish manners and customs?

agree ____ disagree ____ not sure ____

15. Some people these days are demanding that the government must provide basic education in Kurdish. Do you think this would be a good idea?

yes ____ no ____ not sure ____

16. In your opinion, are there any constraints on Kurdish cultural rights?

yes ____ no ____ not sure ____

17. In your opinion, are there any constraints on Kurdish political rights?

yes____ no____ not sure____

Now I will ask some personal questions.

18. You would describe yourself as

A religious person____ not a religious person____ a non-believer____

19. Do you perform the 5 daily prayers?

yes____ no____ no answer____

20. Are you member of a tribe?

yes____ no____ no answer____

21. How strong would you say your attachment is to your Kurdish identity?

very strong____ somewhat strong____ not very strong____ not at all strongly____

22. Which newspaper do you read regularly?

Hürriyet b) Sabah c) Zaman d) Yeni Şafak e) Özgür Gündem f) Sözcü
g) other h) do not read

23. Which TV channel do you usually watch for news?

ATV b) Fox TV c) Samanyolu d) Kanal 7 e) Roj TV f) TRT g) Kanal D
h) NTV i) other

Thank you very much for participating in our survey

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Curriculum Vitae

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Education

Ph.D., Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, Indiana University, Bloomington, 2018.

Minor: Political Science.

Dissertation: Ethnicity, Religion and Political Behavior: The Kurdish Issue in Turkey

MA, International Relations, Middle East Technical University, Ankara/Turkey. 2007.

Master's Thesis: Between Dream and Reality: The Iraqi Kurds.

BA, International Relations, Beykent University, Istanbul/Turkey, 2004.

Research Interests

Politics of Ethnicity; Civil Wars; Social and Political Revolutions; International Relations Theory, History and Politics of the Middle East; Turkish Politics and Turkish Foreign Policy.

Publications

“What is Arab Spring and Does It Matter? A Conceptual Approach to the Popular Uprisings in the Arab World” in Julie Tatlock (ed.), *Contemporary Issues in the Middle East*, Bloomsbury Press: New York, 2019 (forthcoming).

“Ethnic Category and Ethnic Group: A Conceptual Approach to the Kurdish Issue in Turkey” in Aliğa Mammadli, Adeline Braux, Ceyhun Mahmudlu (ed.), *Azerbaijani and Beyond: Perspectives on the Construction of National Identity*, Verlag Dr. Koster, Berlin 2017

“Bir Etnik Sorunun Arkeolojisi: Irak Kürtleri (The Archaeology of an Ethnic Problem: The Kurds in Iraq)” in Kemal İnat and Burhanettin Duran (ed.), *Dünya Çatışma Bölgeleri (The World's Major Conflict Zones)*, Nobel Publications: İstanbul, 2010.

Book Reviews

Review of *Harmonizing Foreign Policy: Turkey, the EU and the Middle East*, by Mesut Özcan, *Alternatives*, Vol. 8 No. 3, 2009.

Review of *Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, by John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *Radikal*, (Turkish daily), 06, 11, 2010.

Working Projects

“The Words You Choose Give Your Ideology Away: Language and Ideology in Turkish Political Landscape,” with Esma Erdoğan Kılıç,

“Ethnic Identity in Social and Political Domains: A New Conceptual Model”

“From Colored Revolutions to the Arab Spring: Why do Political Revolutions Fail to Create Democracies?”

Fellowships and Awards

Distinguished Student Fellowship, IYEM, Istanbul/Turkey (\$10,000), 2008-2010.

Master’s Thesis Research Award, the Foundation for Sciences and Arts, Istanbul/Turkey, (\$2,500), 2006.

Cervia Summer School organized by Bologna University, Italy, on European Union and New Neighborhood, Full Scholarship, 6-24 September 2004.

Full Scholarship, Beykent University, Istanbul, Turkey. 1999-2004

Languages

Turkish (native)
Kurdish (advanced)
English (advanced)
Arabic (intermediate)

Invited Talks

“The Logic of Defection and Collaboration in Ethnic Conflicts: The Kurdish Nationalist Movements in Turkey, Iran and Iraq” invited talk at SETA Foundation, Washington DC, October 28, 2011.

“Between Dream and Reality: the Iraqi Kurds”, invited talk at the Foundation for Arts and Sciences, Istanbul, January 4, 2008.

Conference Presentations

“The Words You Choose Give Your Ideology Away: Language and Ideology in Turkish Political Landscape,” with Esma Erdoğan Kılıç, American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, San Jose, CA, 2018.

“Ethnic category and ethnic group: a conceptual approach to the Kurdish issue in Turkey,”

Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Annual Meeting, Boston, 2016.

“What is Arab Spring and Does It Matter? A Conceptual Approach to the Popular Uprisings in the Arab World, Midwest Political Science Association, Annual Meeting, Chicago, 2016.

“Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Political Behavior: A Conceptual Typology,” Identities on the Move: The Caucasus between the Local, the Regional and the Global, Qafqaz University, Baku, May 15-16, 2015.

“Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Political Behavior: A Conceptual Framework” Midwest Political Science Association, Annual Meeting, Chicago, 2014.

“From Colored Revolutions to Arab Spring: Why do Political Revolutions Fail to Create Democracies?” Midwest Political Science Association, Annual Meeting, Chicago, 2012.

“Secularism and Islam: A Comparative Analyses of Turkey and Pakistan” World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies, Barcelona, Spain, July 19, 2010.

“A Comparative Analysis of Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Gulf War and the Iraqi War in Light of Learning Theory” International Studies Association Annual Convention, New Orleans, LA, USA, February 17, 2010.

“Colored Revolutions: Between Political Decay and Democracy” Southern Political Science Association, Annual Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia, January 7, 2010.

Academic Appointments

Indiana University, Bloomington, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, Associate Instructor (2006-2008).

Indiana University, Bloomington, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, Graduate Assistant (2008-2010).

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