KURDISH
STUDIES

Socio-spatial dynamics of contentious politics: A case of urban warfare in the Kurdish region of Turkey

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Abstract

The literature on contentious politics often explains the dynamics of collective action as a product of sequential events in national and international politics. This time-centred perspective disregards the spatial dynamics of contention. Similarly, analysis on the relation between the Turkish state and Kurdish national movement tends to focus on dynamics and actors in macro politics. However, in the case of urban warfare, macro-level explanations cannot by themselves illustrate why certain localities experienced urban warfare while other districts in the same city or region continued their everyday life. Therefore, this article shifts the focus from macro-political dynamics to micro politics to examine the emergence of urban warfare in Suriçi, Diyarbakır, in 2015. It argues that socio-spatial dynamics comprised significant mechanisms that facilitated the conflict. Overall, it claims that the urban warfare in Suriçi demonstrates that dynamics of mobilization can be captured through a dialectical approach to macro and micro-level politics.

Keywords: Kurdish; urban warfare; curfew; micro politics; socio-spatial dynamics

Abstract in Kurmanji

Dînamîkên sosyo-mekanî yên siyaseta dijwar: Nimûneya şerê bajaran li herêma kurd a Tirkiyeyê

Lêkolînên heyî yên li ser siyaseta dijwar pirê caran dînamîkên tevgera kolektîf weke encama bûyerên peyhatî yên di siyaseta netewî û navnetewî de rave dikin. Ev nêrina zeman-navendî dînamîkên mekanî yên dijwariyê paşguh dikin. Herwiha, analîzên li ser têkiliya di navbera dewleta tirk û tevgera neteweyî ya kurd meyldar in ku bala xwe bidin dînamîk û aktorên makro-siyasetê. Lê belê, di mînaka şerê bajaran de, ravekirinên di asta makro de nikarin nîşan bidin ka çima hin herêman şerê bajaran tecrube kir lê di heman demê de navçeyên din ên heman bajarî an herêmê jiyana xwe ya rojane berdewam kir. Ji ber vê yekê, ev gotar balê ji dînamîkên makro-siyasetê dikşîne ser mîkro-siyasetê ku derketina şerê bajarî ya li Suriçiya Diyarbekirê, ya 2015an, binirxîne. Nîqaş dike ku dînamîkên sosyo-mekanî mekanîzmayên girîng pêk anîn ku pevçûn hêsantir kirin. Bi giştî, îdia dike

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ku şerê bajaran yê Suriçiyê nîşan dide ku dînamîkên seferberiyê bi rêya nêzîkbûneke dîalektîk a siyaseta di astên mîkro û makro de dikarin bên fehmkirin.

Abstract in Sorani

Daynamîkekanî cvakî-cêgeyî syasete mlimlanêyyekan: Dosyeyekî şerrî şarîy le herêmî kurdî le turkya

Edebyatî syasetî mlimlanê zorcar daynemîkî karî bekomell wek berhemî rûdawe yek le dway yekekan le syasetî neteweyî û nêwdewlletîda rûn dekatewe. Em rwange katgeraye daynemîkî cêgeyî mlimlanê feramoş dekat. Be heman şêwe, şrove leser peywendî nêwan dewlletî turk û bzûtnewey neteweyî kurdîş meylî terkîzkirdne ser daynemîkekan û ekterekanî naw makro syasetî heye. Bellam, leprisî şerrî şarîyda, rûnkirdnewekanî rehendî-makro natwanin betenya ewe rûn bkenewe ke boçî lekatêkda hendêk le xellkî xocêyî şerrî şarîyan ezmûn kird le nawçekanî dîkey heman şar yan herêmda xellk le jyanî rojaney xoyan da berdewam bûn. Boye em wtare bo hellsengandinî serhelldanî şerrî şarîy le surîçî dyarbekir le sallî 2015 da, sernic le daynemîkî makrro syasî degwazêtewe bo maykrro syaset. Wtareke ewe miştumirrdekat ke daynemîkekanî cvakî-cêgeyî mîkanîzmî gring le xo wedegrê ke asankarî bo mlimlanêke kirduwe. Be giştî, babeteke cext lewe dekat şerrî şarîy le surîçî ewe derdexat ke daynemîkî mobalîzekirdin dekrêt leser astî makro û maykro syasetda wêna bikrêt.

Abstract in Zazaki

Dînamîkê soyso-herêmkîyî yê polîtîkaya şerkere: Dewaya cengê şaristanan ê herêmanê kurdan ê Tirkîya

Edebîyatê polîtîkayanê şerkeran de zafêrî dînamîkê tevgeranê kolektîfan sey netîceyê serebûtanê sîyasetê neteweyî û mîyanneteweyyan ê rêzkîyan îzah benê. No perspektîfo wextmerkezkî dînamîkê şerkerî yê herêmkîyî îhmal keno. Bi eynî usûlî, analîzê têkilîya mabênê dewleta Tirkîya û tevgerê kurdan ê neteweyî zafane dînamîk û kerdoxanê makropolîtîka ser o vindeno. Çi esto ke cengê şaristanan de nê tewir îzahê sewîyeya pêroyî bi xo nêeşkenê bimusnê ke çira tayê cayan de cengê şaristanan qewimîyeno û eynî dem de taxanê eynî şaristanî yan zî mintiqayanê bînan de cuya rojanîye dewam kena. Coka na meqale bale dînamîkanê makropolîtîkan ra ancena mîkropolîtîka ser ke wina destpêkerdişê cengê şaristanî yê taxa Sûrî ya Dîyarbekirî yê serra 2015î analîz bibo. Tede munaqeşe beno ke dînamîkê sosyo-herêmkîyî mekanîzmayanê muhîmanê ke dest dayî lejî, înan xo de hewêneno. Pêroyî, vajîyena ke cengê şaristanî yê Sûrî musneno ke dînamîkê seferî pê teşebusêko dîyalektîk yê makro- û mîkropolîtîka bêrê dîyene.

Introduction

The failure of the peace process in Turkey as a result of rising authoritarianism and the emergence of Rojava as an autonomous region in northern Syria escalated the tension between the state and Kurdish national

movement[2] in Turkey in 2015. This led the Kurdish national movement to declare self-rule in various districts of the Kurdish region in the summer of 2015. However, these declarations were not recognized by the central government. Instead, the government declared curfews in urban centres from the summer of 2015 up until the spring of 2016, which resulted in violent confrontations between the state and the YDG-H (Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement), the armed, urban Kurdish youth organization, which is in an affiliate of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party).

Suriçi is the historical city centre of Diyarbakır, the largest Kurdish city in Turkey. It is a part of the larger district of Sur, which includes 15 neighbourhoods that are surrounded by city walls (HDP, 2016, p. 14). In the Suriçi district, self-rule was proclaimed on August 14, 2015 (HDP, 2016, p. 21). The first curfew was declared on September 6, 2015, followed by a "security operation" (TİHV, 2017). These security operations turned into an urban war between the YDG-H and the state, which continued until March 9, 2016 (Amnesty International, 2016, p. 9). Although the war ended in 2016, in the six neighbourhoods[3] where the conflict was at its peak, the curfew is ongoing (TİHV, 2017) as of May 18, 2020.

Most of the macro-political explanations for the emergence of urban warfare focus on the failure of the peace process as a result of rising authoritarianism in Turkey and/or the rise of Rojava as an autonomous region under the rule of the PYD (Democratic Union Party), which is allied with the PKK (Bargu, 2016; Gürbüz & Akyol, 2017; Gunter, 2016; Bardakçı, 2016). However, these explanations by themselves cannot illustrate why certain localities experienced urban warfare while other districts in the same city or region continued their everyday life. Therefore, in this article, I examine the micro-level dynamics that facilitated the emergence of urban warfare. I focus on the case of Suriçi, asking why urban warfare emerged nowhere else in Diyarbakır, but in this particular district. This article demonstrates that the socio-spatial dynamics of Suriçi have been constituted within a physical context and through a collective identity, solidarity networks, relations of trust, and strong communal ties. These socio-spatial dynamics made it easier for urban warfare in Suriçi, Diyarbakır, to erupt when the peace process between the state and the Kurdish national movement came to an end in 2015.

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[2] "Kurdish national movement" is an umbrella term that is used throughout the article to refer to today's Kurdish organizations such as PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), YDG-H (Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement), pro-Kurdish political parties, civil society organizations, or different institutions that share the Kurdish "national liberation" (Bozarslan, 2003, p. 859) idea of the PKK, even though it is not overtly indicated in their vision (Watts, 2010, p. 21).

[3] The curfew continues as of May 18, 2020 in the neighbourhoods of Savaş, Dabanoğlu, Cevat Paşa, Fatihpaşa, Hasırlı, and Cemal Yılmaz. Even though there are some streets in these neighbourhoods where there is no curfew, the activists who still work in the region do not have clear idea about the "details" of the ongoing curfew.

This article is built on a qualitative case analysis of Suriçi. It seeks to understand the production of Suriçi as a social space through scrutinizing everyday life patterns. I draw on interviews I conducted in Diyarbakır with 41 people in July 2016, March 2017, and July 2017 (see appendix) as well as my review of newspapers and official reports. I organized interviews with 29 local residents and two Armenian citizens who do not live in the district but regularly visit Suriçi for religious reasons. I also conducted ten elite interviews with people from various organizations and institutions in Diyarbakır such as the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, Dicle University, Diyarbakır Chamber of Architects, and *Sur'un Yıkımına Hayır Platformu* (No to the Destruction of Sur Platform). Since this article focuses on everyday politics, it primarily benefits from the interviews that were conducted with people who either live(d) or use(d) Suriçi and therefore actively participated in everyday life there. Among these local 31 interviewees, 18 were male and 13 were female. Their ages ranged from 17 to 75. The interviewees were of different ethnic and religious backgrounds so as to represent the multicultural configuration of the district.

The interviews were designed as semi-structured. A framework was set beforehand, but the structure of the interviews allowed interviewees to talk about their experiences, prospects, and perceptions about space, as well as the multiple, unconventional ways to use space. Interviewees were identified through snowball sampling. As expected, it was not easy to talk about urban warfare with residents who had directly experienced the violent clashes between the state and the YDG-H. Therefore, I started to conduct preliminary interviews with the residents and mukhtars (elected neighbourhood representatives) of Suriçi whom I met through an intermediary trusted by residents in July 2016. I then continued my interviews with the referrals of my first interviewees. Almost all the interviewees preferred to remain anonymous. Furthermore, even though I assured them that I would use the information they provided anonymously, they were still not willing to talk openly about politics and what happened in Suriçi during the conflict. Therefore, the interviews mostly focused on spatial imaginaries, memories, and experiences of everyday life and practices in Suriçi.

An arena of insurgency: Suriçi, Diyarbakır

Suriçi is the 2000-year-old historical city centre of Diyarbakır. It has an architectural design remaining from the Romans, as well as many cultural and historical monuments from different cultures. It is also bordering Diyarbakır's UNESCO World Heritage sites, which include the Diyarbakır Fortress, the city walls, and the Hevsel Gardens. This situation requires the

protection of Suriçi as a buffer zone to conserve the heritage sites. Though it has been a historical city centre with uninterrupted urban life for at least 2000 years, there have been significant fluctuations in its demographic structure. Before 1915, although different sources suggest different numbers, at least 30% of the population of Diyarbakır was non-Muslim and included Armenians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans (Erol, 2015). Apart from non-Muslim residents there were Turcomans, Arabs, and Kurds. After the Armenian Genocide of 1915, the non-Muslim population in Suriçi dramatically decreased, and later, particularly due to the effects of rural-to-urban migration, the population of Kurds gradually increased, which made Kurds the largest non-Turkish group in Suriçi. Most recently, during the 1980s and 1990s, the area witnessed a high influx of displaced Kurdish villagers due to the civil war between the PKK and the Turkish state (HDP, 2016, p. 14). Particularly from 1991 to 1994, when the civil war was at its peak, there was an important human mobility in the district (KMD, 2010, p. 28). Once dispossessed and displaced villagers started to come to Suriçi, the existing residents started to sell their houses to these newcomers and move out (KMD, 2010). According to the HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) report (2016), the population was 49,711 before the urban warfare began in 2015 and it was dominated by residents who fled their villages during the violent civil war of the 1980s and 1990s (HDP, 2016, p. 14). At the same time, Suriçi was also an important place of encounter between Kurdish activists and paramilitary forces such as JİTEM (Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism) and the Kurdish Hezbollah (a Kurdish Islamist group) during the 1990s (HDP, 2016). As interviewed residents indicated during fieldwork, the concentration of Kurdish residents with common grievances in this particular landscape both strengthened political unity and encouraged communal relations. As a result, Suriçi was an important centre for the Kurdish struggle even before 2015.

The declaration of self-rule and urban warfare in 2015 has become another critical episode of the Kurdish struggle in the district. The Sur People's Assembly, composed of activists, co-presidents of the Sur Municipality, and several residents, declared self-rule in the Hasırlı neighbourhood of Suriçi on August 14, 2015 (HDP, 2016, p. 24). After the declaration of self-rule, the first thing that the urban Kurdish youth who organized under the YDG-H and were supported by the PKK tried to do was to arm themselves and militarily defend "their place" against the state. Arif, a carpenter, claimed that after the declaration of self-rule, the residents started to see the Kurdish youth of Suriçi under arms taking charge of public order in different neighbourhoods. They started to dig trenches and erect barricades to prevent a possible intervention by the state. The state responded to these

trenches and barricades by declaring a curfew and launching a security operation starting on September 6, 2015.
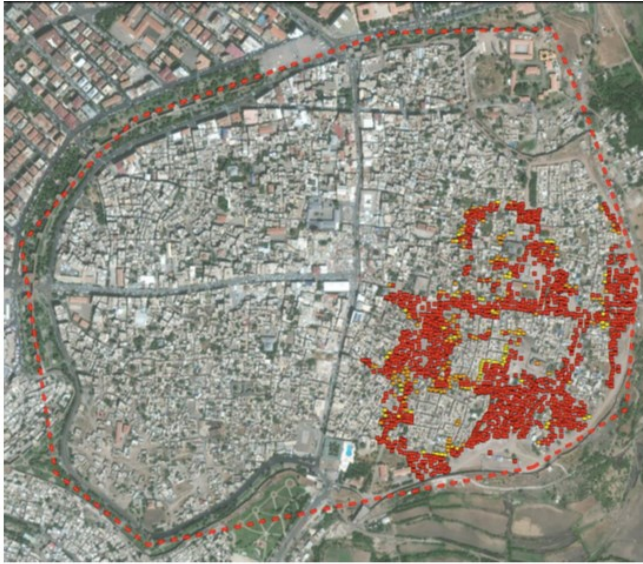
From September 6 to November 28, 2015, the state's armed forces continued their small-scale operations, but they could not enter the neighbourhoods due to the trenches and barricades ("Sur'da neler yaşandı?", 2017). On November 28, 2015, Tahir Elçi, the then president of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, was shot dead during a press conference in front of the Four-Footed Minaret while he was drawing attention to the destruction in the historical city centre because of the armed clashes. After his death, the state declared another curfew on December 2, 2015, which was suspended on December 11, 2015 for only 17 hours and then resumed until March 9, 2016 ("Sur'da operasyonlar", 2016). During the 103 days of urban warfare the YDG-H militias and the state fought each other in the Dabanoğlu, Savaş, Hasırlı, Cemal Yılmaz, Cevat Paşa, and Fatihpaşa neighbourhoods using heavy weapons ("Sur'da neler yaşandı?", 2017).

According to the data provided by the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TİHV, 2017), in total the state declared curfews at least 169 times in the cities and districts in the Kurdish region. Suriçi was one of those districts. The urban war that followed the curfews involved killings, torture, gender-based violence against women, displacements, disappearances, and destruction of homes and cultural monuments in these districts (OHCHR, 2017, p. 5). However, the scale and intensity of the encounter between the state and Kurdish militias differed in each of these places. According to the data provided by the OHCHR (2017), the most serious incidents that caused significant numbers of deaths and large-scale destruction were reported in Cizre, Şırnak, and then in Suriçi, Diyarbakır (p. 5). Nusaybin, one of the districts of Mardin, and Suriçi were two important locations where the largest destruction of houses, public buildings, and businesses occurred (see Figure 1) (OHCHR, 2017, p. 9).

This study takes Suriçi as a crucial case because it was an important centre of urban warfare due to the duration and intensity of the war. It hosted the largest clashes in Diyarbakır that led to severe destruction and high numbers of casualties (HDP, 2016; Amnesty International, 2016). The curfew in the six neighbourhoods of Suriçi has continued beyond the end of the conflict until today (as of May 18, 2020), making it the longest curfew in world history ("Dünyanın en uzun yasağı", 2018). In addition, the expropriation of 6292 parcels of land by the Council of Ministers following the urban warfare (GABB & Sur Municipality, 2016, p. 8; Resmi Gazete, 2016; Amnesty International, 2016, p. 8) illustrates that this was a crucial site of insurgency that the state sought to bring under long-term control. All in all, underlying mechanisms and processes of this mobilization in Suriçi can contribute to

our understanding of the emergence of urban warfare between the state and YDG-H from 2015 to 2016.

Figure 1. Destruction (marked in red) that took place in Suriçi during and in the aftermath of urban warfare as of July 26, 2016 (OHCHR, 2017, p. 10).

Produced by UNITAR – UNOSAT, Copyright: DigitalGlobe, Inc.

■ Destroyed   □ Moderate damage   ■ Impact crater (damage to road)   ⬚ International border
■ Severe damage   ■ Impact crater (damage to field)   ⬚ City extent

Spatializing politics

Lefebvre (2007) claims that space is not a natural or objective entity; it has a history and embeds conflicts within itself. He discusses the revolutionary potential of space by arguing that the violence of power, which actualizes the rationality of the state in space, may be answered through "the violence of subversion" (p. 23). Subversion against this rationality takes the form of wars, revolutions, defeats, and victories (Lefebvre, 2007, p. 23). Merrifield (1993) further highlights that the realization of dominant spatial configurations and imaginaries occurs in a dialectical relation between micro and macro-level politics.

This understanding of space requires us to consider any events, changes or destruction in one locality not just as a mere result of a macro-political decision or change, but also as a result of micro-political dynamics in that locality, which include that place's history, everyday life, and local institutional politics. In the case of urban warfare in Kurdish cities, even

though macro-political explanations of warfare and their implication for macro politics and the peace process have been discussed during and after the urban warfare (Bargu, 2016; Gürbüz & Akyol, 2017; Gunter, 2016; Bardakçı, 2016), the question of what role urban politics played within these districts has remained unanswered.

Before going into detailed discussions of the spatial dynamics of contentious politics, it is crucial to conceptualize what happened in Suriçi in 2015. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) discuss compartmentalization within contentious politics and suggest that focusing on just one of the areas of contentious politics such as social movements, strikes, wars, revolutions, or other forms of political action is limiting (p. 5). Instead, they emphasize the idea of the collective political struggle, which "[…] is episodic rather than continuous, occurs in public, involves interaction between makers of claims and others, is recognized by those others as bearing on their interests, and brings in government as mediator, target, or claimant," (p. 5). Based on this definition of contentious politics, they focus on the causal mechanisms and processes behind contention to trace commonalities rather than classifying varying forms of contentious politics (McAdam et al., 2001).

The Kurdish national movement, with its actors in different scales of action, is a social movement that has struggled for resolution of the century-old Kurdish question in Turkey as well as for the liberation of Kurdish people from Turkish rule since 1974 (see Bozarslan, 2003; Gunes, 2012; Gunes & Zeydanlioglu, 2013; Marcus, 2009; Watts, 2010; White, 2015; Yeğen, 2007). However, what happened in Suriçi was unprecedented in the history of the Kurdish national movement. These events can neither be categorized under the movement's legal politics, nor its guerrilla movement, with its history of military discipline, tactical repertoires, and norms and patterns of its own. This insurgency was an episodic and fragmented moment within the history of the Kurdish struggle led by YDG-H and supported by the PKK and its organization and chain of command are still unclear (Leezenberg, 2016, p. 684). I therefore argue that this insurgency can be described as urban warfare – warfare that occurred in an urban setting involving the use of heavy weaponry by both sides – under the umbrella of contentious politics.

There is an emerging literature on spatial politics and Kurdish issues (Gambetti, 2005; Gambetti, 2008; Gambetti & Jongerden, 2015; Genç, 2014; Jongerden, 2007; Jongerden, 2009). This article seeks to contribute to this growing literature by locating the episodic moment of contention in 2015 in its place, in particular by drawing on the analytical tools provided by the geography of contention literature (Dikeç, 2001; Dikeç, 2005; Harb, 2017; Leitner et al., 2008; Martin & Miller, 2003; Miller & Nicholls, 2013; Nicholls, 2007; Nicholls, 2008; Nicholls, 2009; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2014; Uitermark et al., 2012; Schwedler, 2013; Springer, 2011). In this regard, it is imperative,

following Harb (2017, para. 2), to answer certain questions in order to understand the context of the processes and practices within a certain place that can highlight the contention at stake:

> How and why does urban space contribute to public action and social movements? What is the relationship between power, space, and resistance? How do different groups utilize space to mobilize and facilitate collective action? Which forces that shape space (physical and technological, as well as social, historical, political, and economic) are combined to guide this action? More broadly, how do specific historical, national policies, and global forces shape cities? How are different inequalities constituted by urban life and how do they reconstitute the city? How do the ordinary practitioners of the city negotiate, navigate, appropriate, resist, and transform urban forms?

To provide an answer to these questions, I will draw on the literature on the socio-spatial dynamics of contention. Scholars argue that the city is not the backdrop of social movements but rather a constitutive part of collective action (Uitermark et al., 2012). Hence, instead of treating space as a mere arena in which collective action unfolds, we need to understand it as "a relational conduit" through which a movement connects and develops (Uitermark et al., 2012). From this perspective, Martin and Miller (2003) argue that the ways people perceive, shape, and act upon grievances and opportunities can be shaped by the space, place, and scale in which they reside. In other words, social and political processes emerge at a certain time and in a certain space. Thus, space should not be considered an empty container of activism but a constitutive part of the social processes that leads mobilization in a certain locality. This perspective both redefines our conceptions of contentious politics, which have been extensively discussed from a time-centred perspective, as well as shifts our attention from episodes of contention to mechanisms and processes in a specific time and space (Martin & Miller, 2003).

Notably, Walter J. Nicholls (2007; 2008; 2009) proposes important analytical tools that contribute to our understanding of the geographical reasons behind social movements. He looks at the dynamics of space through networks, trust, strong ties, and solidarity that can emerge in places. Nicholls (2007) argues that it is vital to figure out the role geography has on a social movement in terms of the ways it contributes to people's perception of their problems, and their capacities to form networks and collective identities to struggle against the established system (p. 610). Accordingly, grievances, organizational forms, and the consciousness of insurgents and insurgent groups themselves emerge dialectically in relation to space: "Thus, the specific role of the city for general social movements is in its

function as a relational incubator, facilitating complex relational exchanges that generate a diversity of useful resources for campaigns operating at a variety of spatial scales." (Nicholls, 2008, p. 842). Nicholls (2007) also explains how different places contribute to the nature of mobilization. He states that power relations in terms of political and economic life are not formulated evenly in different localities. This leads to uneven articulation of grievances in distinct geographies, which affects participation in a social movement (Nicholls, 2007, p. 612). Moreover, unevenness in terms of the landscape may also lead to uneven participation of citizens in a social movement in different places due to the fact that political opportunities in a place also depend on its landscape (Nicholls, 2007, p. 613).

Leitner et al. (2008, p. 161) also describe how places are not only sites for dense human interactions within given borders, but also places in which power is imbued and where it is contested when the time comes:

> Places are sites where people live, work and move, and where they form attachments, practice their relations with each other, and relate to the rest of the world. Yet they are more than just sites where dense social relations within and beyond that place join up. They have distinct materiality and a material environment that is historically constructed - networks of roads and railroads, the layout and design of residences, offices, factories, public parks and recreation areas fences, walls, etc. This materiality regulates and mediates social relations and daily routines within a place, and is thus imbued with power.

Furthermore, it can be argued that this materiality of the place, as it draws the boundaries of interaction, also affects the socio-spatial boundaries of action and mobility.

This article benefits from the emerging literature on the geography of contentious politics, and further strives to provide a possible road map to "spatializing politics." To illustrate how Suriçi as a social space (re)produced certain economic, political, and social relations in everyday life that allowed for the emergence of urban warfare in 2015, I offer four explanatory categories of socio-spatial dynamics. These are largely informed by Nicholls' conceptual framework and other scholarly works on the geography of contentious politics: (1) physical characteristics of a place that facilitate collective life practices and undermine the effectiveness of state penetration, (2) formation of a place-based collective identity, (3) strong communal ties, relations of trust, and solidarity reproduced through daily practice, and (4) the existence of a relatively autonomous space for politicization.

The roots of insurgency: Socio-spatial dynamics of urban warfare in Suriçi

Physical characteristics of the place that facilitate collective life practices and undermine the effectiveness of state penetration

As Leitner et al. (2008) put it, the materiality of space regulates and mediates various social relations and everyday life. It also draws the boundaries of mobilization in a given place. Similarly, the physicality of Suriçi brought about certain everyday life practices that allowed for the formation of a collective identity, communal ties, and relations of trust and solidarity among residents. Moreover, the architectural design also undermined the effectiveness of the state penetration before and after the urban warfare. Therefore, it was a primary mechanism that contributed to the emergence of urban warfare.

When the interviewees talked about the reasons for the emergence of warfare during fieldwork, they always stressed Suriçi's physical feasibility as a battlefield alongside its ideological unity. For instance, Mehmet, one of my interviewees, argued that a great majority of people supported the struggle against the state intervention in 2015; however, this in itself would not be enough to explain the emergence of urban warfare if the physical conditions had not been feasible for such an insurgency. He asserted that in Diyarbakır's Bağlar district, for instance, Kurdish people were also politically united, but the roads are larger than Suriçi. In a place like Suriçi, erecting a trench in order to block state forces from going into the neighbourhoods was easier. Indeed, Suriçi had many cul-de-sacs and very narrow streets in which only two or three people could walk side by side. While this architectural design enabled everyday interaction and dialogue based on close proximity before urban war, it also prevented the entrance of large vehicles like tanks. This configuration of the district made it harder for it to be captured by state forces. In the 1990s, this architectural design had allowed people to escape from the police raids. In 2015 and 2016, it enabled the Kurdish militias to transform the small streets into front lines to defend the inner city.

In addition to small streets and cul-de-sacs, old buildings, which accommodated several families in one house and contributed to the formation of strong ties among different families prior to war, helped the young Kurdish militias defend themselves during the conflict because—compared to apartment blocks of today—the basalt houses in Suriçi could withstand bullets better. Some of the interviewees, referring to the historical structure of Suriçi, implied (though did not elaborate) that young Kurdish militias might also have discovered old spots or gateways to defend themselves or escape when it was necessary.

Overall, the architectural design of the district was one of the important dynamics that paved the way for urban warfare in two ways. First, the landscape of Suriçi provided tactical opportunities for the Kurdish national movement because of its defensive city walls, as well as its small streets, gateways, and old houses made of basalt. Second, it also drew the boundaries of everyday interaction, which contributed to the formation of collective identity, communal ties, and relations of trust and solidarity in the district. This latter aspect will be elaborated in more detail in the sections below.

Formation of a place-based collective identity

The social movement literature strives to understand the process of collective identity formation that paves the way for collective action in political life (Miller, 2000). Scholars tend to look at the class, gender, ethnic, or religious identities that generate social movements. However, Miller (2000) suggests that place-based identity formation may also facilitate political mobilization. He claims that place-based identity is constructed through a sense of space and is sometimes strongly associated with the space itself (Miller, 2000, p. 64). I argue that the residents of Suriçi constructed identity on the grounds of being from Suriçi, and that they combined this identity with their Kurdishness when they organized around the Kurdish national movement. Thus, collective identity formation and the emergence of urban warfare in 2015 was facilitated through a strong sense of belonging to the place, situating Kurdish identity within Suriçi's multicultural past, and tying it to common grievances articulated in the place.

As Nicholls (2009) discusses, if a place is physically stable, political subjects have a higher chance of building a coherent togetherness on the grounds of recurring encounters. In Suriçi, too, the interaction between different groups of people was important in forming a collective identity based on a sense of belonging throughout the area's long history as Diyarbakır's city centre. Suriçi is a historical centre where people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds have formed dense links with one another and with the space itself over the years. Though the diversity of the district has declined over the last century and Kurdish people started to dominate the district demographically—especially after the migration waves of the 1980s and 1990s—the image of the old multicultural Suriçi and strong relations among different groups has been one of the reference points in terms of how residents lived, remembered, and felt part of it.

Historicity and centrality are essential for understanding the powerful sense of belonging experienced by residents (Interviews with Kazım, Hüseyin, Ciwan, Sadık, Yavuz). Mahmut, a former resident who moved to Suriçi in the 1980s but was forced to leave after the urban warfare began,

explained this situation: "If they ask me where Diyarbakır is, I would say Sur is Diyarbakır. Before, there was no other place. There weren't any of these neighbourhoods [outside of Suriçi that you can see now]. These areas were like a desert. There was only Sur" (Mahmut, personal communication, 2016). This historical centrality of the place, according to Mahmut, was what engendered the formation of the identity of Suriçi and the identity of being from Suriçi.

While its historicity and centrality distinguished it from the other, newly established districts and neighbourhoods in Diyarbakır, they also reverberated in the way the residents framed everyday relations. Sabri's depiction, for instance, shows how the residents narrated the unique environment in the district and how human interaction was understood within this framework of spatial uniqueness: "Sur is literally a distinct region, let's say a distinct city. It is a small city which has a social life of its own. Human relations within Suriçi are excellent; it is not possible to find such a social life outside of Sur" (Sabri, personal communication, 2016).

The depiction of Suriçi's long history as the city centre is important in three senses. First, Suriçi has historically functioned like a hub, offering urban services including markets, transportation, and communications networks. Second, inhabitation has a much longer history than Diyarbakır's other districts, including Bağlar, which began to emerge in 1960s; Yenişehir, which began to emerge in the 1950s; or Kayapınar, which began to emerge in the late 2000s and 2010s (Diken, 2020; also see Diken, 2002; 2004; 2014). This enabled people to form a strong sense of belonging with respect to the historical background of the place. Third, because it is a historical city centre, long-term residents have been able to form strong communal relations with other co-habitants, and newcomers have been integrated within these long-lasting communal relations.

When interviewees described their childhood memories, they highlighted the importance of the impact of long-lasting communal relations with an emphasis on the neighbourhood's multicultural past. Their childhood memories depict Suriçi as a place of diversity, rather than a monolith based on exclusive Muslimness (Interviews with Hüseyin, Cemil, Aylin, İbrahim). Even though most of the interviewees were Muslim Kurds[4], they made reference to Suriçi's non-Muslim past, rather than talking about their relations with other Muslim groups such as Turks or Arabs. Muslim Kurds claimed that they built close relations based on trust with non-Muslim residents:

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[4] According to my Syriac interviewee, there were only four Syriac families, one Chaldean family, and one Armenian family in the district by the time I did my fieldwork in Suriçi in 2017.

> Our neighbours usually were Christians, Jews, and Armenians. We lived together. When we went out of town, we would give our keys to them. We would not give our keys to the Muslim families, but we would give them to non-Muslims; don't get me wrong, we trusted them. (Murat, personal communication, 2016)

Apo, a former Armenian resident, also emphasized the harmonious environment that he witnessed and heard about from his mother. He posited that they had Jewish, Syriac, Armenian, and Kurdish neighbours with whom they formed close relations, which even included women doing everyday domestic work together.

According to Nicholls (2008), such radical diversity in a city provides residents with a sense of freedom from the tightly circumscribed roles, norms, and expectations that one may find in culturally homogenous places (p. 3). Places of diversity can inspire new innovative relations, while, at the same time, such places might be targeted by the state—due to their "wild" character—to maintain order (Nicholls, 2008, p. 4). Similarly, according to the interviewees, the state's intervention in Suriçi should be seen as an attack on the religious and ethnic diversity in the district. Sadık, for instance, argued that this togetherness was against the AKP's (Justice and Development Party) monist ideology based on Muslimness and Turkishness. This ideology was also present in the AKP's imaginary regarding Suriçi throughout the 2000s. It initiated various urban projects in the district that aimed especially to revive its Muslim and Turkish background (Genç, 2014, p. 231-232). According to the interviewees, the Kurdish militia fought against this monist ideology of the AKP in 2015 by acting upon their identity, which had been constructed primarily on the basis of Kurdishness but ideologically enriched through the old multicultural codes and everyday interaction in Suriçi:

> The intervention from the outside to a degree was an intervention in the cultural and political life in Suriçi. […] They wanted to wipe this culture away. […] Thus, the people responded to this intervention by integrating the cultural and political identity of Suriçi. In the end, it is not a self-evident phenomenon that a 70-year-old mother gets behind those barricades. Likewise, it is not a self-evident phenomenon that a 17- or 18-year-old teen stands behind those barricades. This occurred via the integration of the politicized Kurdish identity and the identity of Suriçi. (Mahmut, personal communication, 2016)

Without denying the fact that both Muslim and non-Muslim residents of Suriçi warmheartedly recalled their close relations with each other during

the interviews, it would be misleadingly nostalgic to depict Suriçi as a utopian place, sheltered from the turbulent history of violence against non-Muslim citizens in the region since the beginning of the 20th century. Everyday discrimination against non-Muslim residents has worked for the benefit of the Muslim residents in the region even in the 2000s. However, especially throughout the 2000s, the multicultural vision of the Kurdish national movement brought about a certain degree of restoration of the multicultural past both physically and socially. For instance, Davut, a religious leader from the non-Muslim community, gave the example of the Kırklar Assembly[5] (*Kırklar Meclisi*) as an important institutional attempt towards this end. Among other efforts, this initiative to uncover the non-Turkish and non-Muslim background of Suriçi (Gambetti, 2008; Genç, 2014, p. 231) had an important impact on how the residents of the district remembered it.

To trace the process of place-based identity formation and its impact on urban warfare, we also need to pay attention to human mobility within the long history of the district. In this sense, the migration influx in the district in the 1980s and 1990s was critical. Though dispossessed and displaced villagers settled all over the district, the Fatihpaşa, Savaş and Hasırlı neighbourhoods were three main neighbourhoods that newcomers populated with particular density (KMD, 2010). The "old" residents of both Suriçi and greater Diyarbakır believed that the concentration of these deprived families sped up a process of "slumification" of these neighbourhoods. Although there has been an increase in the numbers of poor-quality shanty houses and unlicensed two/three-story buildings after these migration waves, the so-called slumification of these neighbourhoods was primarily due to the insufficient infrastructure and public services, which could not handle the increase in population (KMD, 2010). Further, concentration of migrants who lacked steady income meant that these neighbourhoods had the highest crime rates in Diyarbakır (KMD, 2010, p. 19). This contributed to the treatment of these neighbourhoods as dangerous slums.

This process seemingly damaged the harmonious picture in the district by inflicting fear of crime and creating a divergence between "us" and "them" among the old and new residents of Suriçi. However, as my interviewees argued, the Kurdish national movement has become a catalyst for the formation of a sense of community between the old and new residents, through its promotion of a collective identity based on the idea of being from

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[5] In 2012, the mayor of the Sur Municipality, Abdullah Demirbaş, formed an assembly that functioned as an advisory committee to the municipality (Baysal, 2015). This committee aimed to reveal and strengthen the multicultural background of the district. Every religious and ethnic community had a representative in this assembly, which functioned up until the beginning of urban warfare.

Suriçi and on the Kurdishness of the district. Further, throughout the 2010s, there has been an opening in Suriçi as a result of the restoration and cultural revival projects led both by municipalities run by pro-Kurdish political parties and representatives of ministries, as well as by the Governorship of Diyarbakır. Pioneered by public institutions, these projects also attracted private investors to initiate restoration activities by buying Diyarbakır houses, old inns, and mansions, and turning them into cafes and restaurants. This process contributed to transforming Suriçi into a trade and tourism centre and it also started to change the public perception of these neighbourhoods as being "dangerous slums."

Nevertheless, once the Kurdish national movement started to organize in the district from the 1990s onward, these neighbourhoods became the hub of an emerging political unity based on common grievances, including being the part of the urban poor as well as a conflict-affected population (Interviews with Sabri, Ciwan and Ruken). As Nicholls (2007) argues, spatial unevenness in terms of social, political, and economic life generates different grievances in society. Once these grievances are articulated and politicized, they contribute to mobilization in a given place (Nicholls, 2007, p. 612). After the Kurdish forced migrants settled in Suriçi's deprived neighbourhoods, they experienced a similar spatial unevenness in terms of accessing social and public services. Further, they lacked regular income. Moreover, Sabri, from the Savaş neighbourhood, argued that all of the families in these neighbourhoods suffered from violence inflicted by the state in one way or another:

> In Sur, there was not one community in which one family did not pay the price of this political struggle, did not suffer, whose village was not burned down, or who was not tortured. Not one. Any of the families you call for an interview would tell you a similar story. Even if nothing happened to them, their villages would probably have been burned or they would have been forced from their homes. This group of people has all united in Sur. (Sabri, personal communication, 2016)

Thus, it was not a coincidence that the neighbourhoods in which urban warfare erupted most violently were the same neighbourhoods that went through the process of "slumification" during and after the 1990s.

Strong communal ties, relations of trust, and solidarity reproduced through daily practice

Nicholls (2007; 2008; 2009) suggests that strong ties, trust, and solidarity networks reproduced through everyday interactions based on proximity and stability are important facilitators of social movements. In the case of

Suriçi, apart from the identity and sense of belonging that has been produced through the place, everyday social practices shaped through strong communal ties, relations of trust, and solidarity facilitated the emergence of urban warfare in 2015.

Many of my interviewees dwelled on the nature of social life in the district. They described neighbourhood relations to illustrate the strong communal ties, (re)produced in daily practices and encounters, that are unique to Suriçi. For instance, Mahmut asserted that in Diyarbakır's new larger residential areas, neighbours do not know each other. However, in Suriçi everyone knew each other, even if they were not each other's next-door neighbours.

In order to describe the tight communal relations, almost all of the interviewees made reference to reciprocal relations. For instance, they talked about how every evening, each neighbour would give a plate of their own dinner to their neighbours, and in exchange, their neighbours would also share their food with them. As a result of this dominant social interaction based on reciprocity, every evening residents would sit at a dinner table that would consist of at least five or six different dishes. These reciprocal relations were crucial in terms of the survival of residents, in a context where many households did not have any income or had to rely on an income of maximum 500 Turkish Liras per month (KDA, 2012, p. 123).

In addition to relations based on reciprocity, interviewees often referred to the uninterrupted neighbourhood relations up until 2015. For instance, Arzu stated that she had come to the Hasırlı neighbourhood when she was 17 years old and that she had had the same neighbours for 41 years until she had to move out. These uninterrupted neighbourhood relations enabled the formation of strong ties over time. These strong ties among the neighbours led them to embrace each other's problems or happiness as their own over time, leading to a sense of empathy among the residents:

> When there was a wedding, we would embrace it as a neighbourhood. Nobody would call one person the host of the wedding. People would say that this wedding belongs to this street or that neighbourhood. Everybody would make the wedding their own there. (Sabri, personal communication, 2016)

However, it wasn't only strong communal ties that perpetuated a politically organized stance. According to Ciwan from Hasırlı, a shared ideological stance amongst families also enriched communal ties. Most of the families were Kurds who suffered from political violence in different ways because of their ethnic identity. Some of them had family members in the mountains as guerrilla forces fighting for the PKK, some of them had family members in jail because of their political activities, or they were families who had been

forced to leave their villages as a result of the civil war. Thus, they were ideologically close to one another. Due to this demographic structure, it would be hard not to expect such strong solidarity.

When it comes to an understanding of the production of this unity in a social and political sense, Ciwan recounted that the residents of Suriçi who had jobs or went to school would leave their houses in the mornings. Others would go out to the streets and sit together with their neighbours and relatives. He recalled that politics would be the hot topic during these conversations, as might be expected in an environment where people have been systematically discriminated against because of their ethnic background. This dialogue would also contribute to the collective sense-making in terms of the Kurdish issue or other political discussions. Rojda, an interviewee from Hasırlı, stated that when Newroz approached, they would come together and start to discuss what to wear or what to do for Newroz in their neighbourhood with their friends. Thus, spatial dynamics that brought people together also aided the process of learning politics, becoming a united whole, so to speak, and being politically organized around one struggle on the basis of a Kurdish identity.

These strong communal ties among the residents also led them to trust one another. This sense of trust appears in childhood memories:

> Sur was a way of life. Sur was a fraternity, Sur was friendship, Sur was neighbourliness, Sur was hospitality. At that time [in Sur], it was such a life that when a resident went somewhere for a while, he or she would leave his or her keys with neighbours or whomever without regard to their ethnicity. The doors were not closed. (Mehmet, personal communication, 2016)

Not surprisingly, these strong ties and relations based on trust also helped residents to build solidarity networks socially, politically, and economically among each other as a community. These networks assisted residents with everyday problems. In that sense, Suriçi was a place where you could not find a "poor person" in the neighbourhood (Mehmet). Once they saw a person in need in their neighbourhood, all of the residents would support this person or family communally. Although the economic conditions of the residents did not differ from each other to a great extent, they tried to empower each other economically when it was necessary. For instance, they shared their food and stocks, a tradition that improved everyone's living conditions to a similar standard:

> The residents of Suriçi always helped each other. Let me give you an example: if I got ten sacks of wheat from the village, what would I do? I would take five sacks for myself, then I would

allocate the remaining to my neighbours. (Yavuz, personal communication, 2016)

These relations of solidarity increased chances of survival in the district and also helped to sustain the demographic consistency until 2015.

Such relations did not only help to maintain households. Strong political organization and ties of solidarity also led residents to band together against outside "threats." As Sabri explained, for instance, people who were wanted for arrest in the 1990s could go and knock on the door of any house and be taken in. If they said that they were in a difficult situation, these people could stay and be sheltered in that house for months without any further questions from the host. Rojda also argued that police intervention in the neighbourhood was expected on certain occasions, such as the birthday of Abdullah Öcalan, the anniversary of the founding of the PKK, or Newroz. When young Kurds would gather for the celebration of these events, the police forces would intervene in their gatherings. Then, young Kurdish activists would fight back against the police forces, and the police forces in turn would use tear gas and water cannons on protesters. During those clashes, residents would help the protesters by giving them water or lemons even though they would not participate in the protest directly.

Nicholls (2008) argues that in a place where certain norms are constructed through everyday relations, collective actors can act upon certain expectations (p. 5). In Suriçi, relations of solidarity in everyday life became the norm, sustaining Kurdish youth when they participated in the urban warfare. They believed that this solidarity network, which had protected the residents from "foreign threats" until now, would also help them during the period of urban warfare. They were right to an extent. Ayşe, from the Fatihpaşa neighbourhood, claimed that some of the families who shared a similar ideological orientation with the young Kurdish militias accepted militants into their homes and helped them during the urban warfare. Nazlı, from Ali Paşa Neighbourhood, also added that people from time to time made a commotion by knocking on doors or banging pans and pots in support of the young Kurdish militias.

A relatively autonomous space for politicization

The final way in which the spatial characteristics of Suriçi affected the nature of the confrontation between state security forces and Kurdish fighters was through its relatively autonomous environment for politicization. By relative autonomy I refer to the capacity of the residents to resolve their problems through their own means, without government assistance, provisions, services, and institutions. This relative autonomy was constructed by the organizations of the Kurdish national movement,

building on already-existing socio-spatial dynamics. This situation, in turn, strengthened the political movement's influence. In the 2010s, the movement tried to expand these autonomous areas through continual bypassing of the mechanisms of the state. Thus, this relative autonomy became another significant socio-spatial dynamic that rendered the declaration of self-rule easier and in turn led to urban warfare.

Suriçi's architectural outline, being surrounded by city walls, rendered the district a physically safeguarded space. This also allowed activists from the Kurdish movement to act in a relatively autonomous space, facilitating both political organization and helping the activists to escape state intervention. As one resident indicates:

> In Suriçi, houses are adjacent to one another. You can start from a rooftop in [the] Savaş neighbourhood and can go from one rooftop to another as far as [the] Cemal Yılmaz or Hasırlı neighbourhoods. The system [state] cannot intervene in this situation. I can remember from my youth that even though one was being sought by the police and the police searched the home to catch that person, it was impossible. Even if all of Sur was blockaded, it would still not be possible to seize that person. When the police knocked on the door, that person could find their way in Sur and save themselves. Sur was such a place (Sabri, personal communication, 2016).

Alongside the architectural design of the district, associations and initiatives that were founded by the movement added to its relative autonomy. The residents developed initiatives through which they tried to solve their problems without interference from the state. Ciwan stated that when two families had a problem, neighbourhood associations that were established by the movement or its local bodies would be the mediator between the parties. This mediatory role of the associations and informal initiatives of the movement prevented the entrance of the police force in everyday life when there was a dispute between residents. Ciwan also argued that the demand of young Kurds was to perpetuate this self-regulated everyday life without any "foreign" intervention. This also shows that the demand for self-rule had been already realized in certain areas of everyday life and, for some of the residents, the call for self-rule had been justified through their direct participation in these self-ruling mechanisms even before the declaration of self-rule.

In addition to the mediatory civic mechanisms, the Kurdish youth who in 2013 organized under the name of YDG-H, later became a parallel security force in the city, acting against what they perceived as problems like drug-trafficking, gambling, and prostitution which residents argued were

purposefully upheld by the state to weaken the Kurdish movement. According to Mehmet, the state tried to dissolve Kurdish unity in Suriçi starting in the 1990s by channelling or not intervening in drug trafficking, gambling, and prostitution in the district. The interviewees suggested that the state did not intervene in drug use and prostitution on purpose because it aimed to morally and politically corrupt the Kurdish youth. However, once the YDG-H achieved a greater level of organisation during the 2010s, thanks both to the relatively autonomous situation and the relatively liberal period during the peace process, they started to intervene in what they perceived as state-induced problems. "The problems of drugs, gambling, and prostitution" were among the important problems which they solved by their own means and "cleaned" Suriçi ("YDG-H'liler", 2014). In other words, even prior to urban warfare in 2015 the Kurdish national movement sought to undermine state penetration in the district, drawing on everyday politics and autonomous mechanisms in Suriçi, which had been shaped through socio-spatial dynamics. This contributed to the self-rule decision in the district based on the relative autonomy that had been constructed in everyday life over time.

Conclusion

I have presented a micro-level analysis of the emergence of urban warfare in Suriçi, concentrating on everyday politics. The analysis of socio-spatial dynamics in Suriçi demonstrates that mobilization in 2015 was embedded in the context, meanings, symbols, and images that have been simultaneously deconstructed and reconstructed by the residents of the district. In Suriçi, the physical boundaries of the district drew the boundaries of interaction in everyday life as well as the boundaries of action and mobilization before and during the time of contention. The everyday interaction within the material space created an environment through which the residents constructed solidarity networks, strong communal ties, relations of trust, and collective identity. These socio-spatial dynamics in everyday politics contributed to the emergence of urban warfare when the peace process between Turkey and the Kurdish national movement came to an end in the context of rising authoritarianism in 2015.

Acknowledgments

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APPENDIX LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Pseudonym	Date of Interview	Occupation
Mahmut	2016	Activist
Sadık	2016	Wageworker
Kazım	2016	Officer
Sabri	2016	Activist
Yavuz	2016	Mukhtar
Mehmet	2016	Mukhtar
Murat	2016	Security staff
Arif	2017	Carpenter
İbrahim	2017	Tinsmith
Ekrem	2017	Tinsmith
Fatma	2017	Homemaker
Serdar	2017	Wageworker
Rojda	2017	Student
Ciwan	2017	Student
Arzu	2017	Homemaker
Cemil	2017	Retired
Aylin	2017	Homemaker
Zeynep	2017	Homemaker
Zeliha	2017	Homemaker
Aras	2017	Non-Muslim religious leader
Arzu	2017	Homemaker
Fadime	2017	Homemaker
Belgin	2017	Homemaker
Karanfil	2017	Student
Nazlı	2017	Homemaker
Narin	2017	Homemaker
Nurgül	2017	A purged officer from the municipality
Ayşe	2017	Health officer
Sıla	2017	Civil Servant
Yakup	2017	Non-Muslim religious leader
Apo	2017	Retired
Sedat	2017	Self-employed
Mert	2017	Student
Azat	2017	Member of DİMOD
Lale	2017	Activist from No to Destruction of Sur
Hüseyin	2017	Retired
Sedat	2017	Civil Servant
Melek	2017	Professor
Meltem	2017	Civil Servant
Metin	2017	Civil Servant
Saadet	2017	Civil Servant