

**CLASS AND ETHNICITY INTERACTION: KURDISH QUESTION AND
TRADE UNIONS IN TURKEY**

by

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**CLASS AND ETHNICITY INTERACTION: KURDISH QUESTION AND
TRADE UNIONS IN TURKEY**

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to contribute to the discussion of class and identity politics through highlighting the interaction of the two dimensions of identity: class and ethnicity. More specifically, it intends to underline the intertwined nature of class and ethnic oppression through analyzing the views of the economically oppressed on the ethnically oppressed. The two trade unions, Petrol-İş and Hava-İş, are chosen as data in order to explore how the members of these class-based organizations interpret an ethnic conflict: the Kurdish question. The main conclusion of the interviews with the union managers and the workers is that class identity may help to interact with other forms of oppression in the socialization processes. These processes are differently experienced by the members of the two trade unions. While the Petrol-İş workers' individual politicization processes in line with the unionist movement are influential in being emphatic to the oppression of Kurds, the Hava-İş workers' mobilization with the Turkish Airlines strike plays a determining role for the formation of the class identity and developing an empathy to the oppression of Kurds. Moreover, our findings show that workers who have not experienced these politicization and mobilization processes, and those workers lack the class identity possess discriminative attitudes to the demands of the Kurds and the Kurdish movement.

ÖZET

SINIF VE ETNİSİTE BAĞDAŞIMI: TÜRKİYE’DE KÜRT MESELESİ VE SENDİKALAR

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Anahtar Kelimeler: işçi sınıfı, etnisite, Kürt Meselesi, sendikalar, sınıf kimliği

Bu çalışma sınıf ve etnisite kavramlarının bağdaşımına ışık tutarak, sınıf ve kimlik politikaları tartışmalarına katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, ekonomik olarak ezilmiş kesimin etnik ezilmişliği nasıl yorumladığı analiz edilmiştir. Data olarak, sınıf örgütleri olan Petrol ve Hava İşçi Sendikaları seçilerek, bu iki sendika işçilerinin Kürt Meselesi’ne nasıl baktığı incelenmiştir. Sendika yöneticileri ve işçileri ile yapılan görüşmeler sonucunda, temel olarak, işçi sınıfı kimliğinin diğer yapıdaki ezilmişliklerle etkileşim halinde olabileceği görülmüştür. İşçilerin bu etkileşimin bilincine varması çeşitli sosyalleşme biçimleri ve süreçleri doğrultusunda olduğu saptanmıştır. Petrol-İş işçilerinin Kürt’lerin ezilmişliğiyle bir empati kurmasında, sendikal hareketin de bir parçası olduğu, kişisel politikleşme süreçleri etkili olmuştur. Hava-İş işçileri ise, Türk Hava Yolları grevi ile birlikte mobilize olarak, hem sınıf kimliği oluşturmuşlar hem de Kürtler’in ezilmişliğine empati geliştirmişlerdir. Ayrıca, sınıf kimliklerini vurguladıkları halde bu sosyalleşme ve politikleşme süreçlerinden geçmeyen ve/veya sınıf kimliği edinmeyen işçilerin Kürt hareketine ve taleplerine ayrımcı bir tutum sergiledikleri görülmüştür.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 2. LITERATURE REVIEW | 4 |
| 2.1. The Classical Approach on Class | 5 |
| 2.2. Class as an Obsolete Variable | 8 |
| 2.3. Class Still Matters..... | 10 |
| 2.3.1. Class as Suppressing Identities | 13 |
| 2.3.2. Multiple Subjectivities in Class | 14 |
| 2.4. Class and Ethnicity Interaction | 16 |
| 2.5. The Conclusion | 19 |
| 3. TRADE UNIONS AND THE KURDISH QUESTION IN TURKEY | 20 |
| 3.1. Trade Unions | 20 |
| 3.1.1. Unionism in the 1960s-80s | 21 |
| 3.1.1.1. <i>The Background</i> | 21 |
| 3.1.1.2. <i>The Political Atmosphere and Trade Unions in the 1960s</i> | 23 |
| 3.1.1.3. <i>The Era of Active Unionism: the 1970s</i> | 25 |
| 3.1.2. Unionism after the 1980s | 28 |
| 3.1.2.1. <i>The Military Coup and Unionism in the 1980s</i> | 28 |
| 3.1.2.2. <i>Unionism by the 2000s</i> | 31 |
| 3.2. The Kurdish Question in Turkey..... | 33 |
| 3.2.1. The Evolution of the Kurdish Question in the Early Republican Period | 34 |
| 3.2.2. The Left in the 1960s: the Kurdish Question as a Regional Disparity and Ethnic Discrimination..... | 35 |
| 3.2.2.1. <i>The Independent Socialist Kurdish Movement in the 1960s</i> | 37 |
| 3.2.3. The 1970s: Is Kurdistan a Colony, or not? | 38 |
| 3.2.3.1. <i>The PKK: Socialist, Independent and Kurdish Armed Struggle</i> | 40 |
| 3.2.4. The 1980s and Afterwards..... | 41 |
| 3.2.4.1. <i>The Kurdish Question as an Ethnic Problem</i> | 41 |
| 3.2.4.2. <i>The Kurdish Question as a class and ethnic based problem</i> | 44 |
| 4. METHODOLOGY | 49 |
| 4.1. The Scope of the Research..... | 49 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| 4.2. The Research Approach..... | 49 |
| 4.2.1. Methodology of Data Collection..... | 49 |
| 4.2.2. Sampling..... | 52 |
| 4.2.2.1. Petrol-Iş as a Case..... | 53 |
| 4.2.2.2. Hava-Iş as a Case..... | 55 |
| 5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS..... | 58 |
| 5.1. Petrol-Iş..... | 59 |
| 5.1.1. Unionism and Definition of the Working Class..... | 59 |
| 5.1.2. Unionist Identity and Identity Politics..... | 69 |
| 5.1.3. The Kurdish Question and Every day Practices of Kurds..... | 74 |
| 5.2. Hava-Iş..... | 82 |
| 5.2.1. Unionism and Definition of the Working Class..... | 82 |
| 5.2.2. Unionist Identity and Identity Politics..... | 87 |
| 5.2.3. The Kurdish Question and Every day Practices of Kurds..... | 90 |
| 5.3. The Comparison between Petrol-Iş and Hava-Iş..... | 97 |
| 6. CONCLUSION..... | 100 |
| References | 105 |
| Appendix A..... | 116 |
| Appendix B..... | 120 |
| Appendix C..... | 122 |

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“Like beads and Che Guevara berets, class is passé”. Quoted from the book of *The Death of Class* by Pakulski and Waters (1996, p.1), this argument has been pretty fashionable in the academic realm. It is supported by the claim that the new dimensions—gender, ethnicity, sexual orientations—in the social strata and politics have taken the place of class. It is explained by the argument that class boundaries have been blurred through new self-identifications, which are mostly fed by occupations, educational levels, sexual or ethnic identities. Accordingly, new social and political movements have begun to be based on these identifications. It is clear that the majority of the civil conflicts in the post-Cold War era have been classified as ethnic, fighting for ethno-national autonomy or independence (Scherrer, 1994). Thus, it is inevitable to acknowledge the significance of these ‘new’ associations. However, a social dimension’s popularity in a period of time does not necessarily eliminate another’s importance. This fallacy has led class to be ignored, causing insufficient explanations of identity politics, including ethnic conflicts. When they are deeply analyzed, it is seen that ethnic conflicts which are generally caused by social inequalities are in relation to class conflicts. It is due to the fact that the cultural suppression of ethnic minorities mostly coincides with the economic suppression, or vice versa. In other words, the geographies which are classified as uneven developed are also culturally oppressed ones.

Approaches on class have different arguments for the interaction of class and ethnicity. On the one hand, the classical approach on class, led by Marxism, strongly argues that the most important form of oppression is based on economy. On the other hand, some other scholars (Gibson-Graham, 2001; Özselçuk, 2006; Althusser, 1979) who believe in validity of class in the recent social, political and economic conjuncture suggest that class may have multiple subjectivities which are in relation with each other. Even, relations of these different identities/movements can support one another. Flexing the definition of class, this contemporary approach in class deserves an attention to understand class and ethnicity interactions which find a significant place in the ethnic conflicts.

In the case of Turkey, the Kurdish question is worthy to analyze with its class and ethnic based dimensions. The Kurdish identity could not create a space for itself since the beginning of the Turkish Republic. In the 1960s, the rise of socialist movements—including unionist movements—paved a way for the discussion of the Kurdish question. In this era, the discussion of the issue was based on its both ethnic and class nature, in parallel with the Kurdish movement which had a socialist line in addition to identity awareness. By the 1980s, the Kurdish movement began to sever its ties with the left of Turkey—which went towards a classical approach on class—through emphasizing more of the Kurdish ethnic identity. The stances of the left and the Kurdish movement are not very different in today’s political environment. However, it is problematic to consider the Kurdish question as a mere ethnic problem in accordance with the neoliberal logic, or within the frame of nationalism, as classical Marxists do. It is due to the fact that both approaches are likely to give insufficient explanation for the question itself, and for its resolution.

In order to observe these relations between class and ethnicity, trade unions—class based organizations—can provide valuable data. The ties between the left and the Kurdish movement in the 1960s can be considered as relevant for the relations between the trade unions and the Kurdish movement. By definition, being involved in the left-wing political arena, the trade unions of Turkey were used to be concerned with the Kurdish movement in the 1960s. However, after ideological divisions between the Kurdish movement and the left, the trade unions’ concern on the Kurdish question has been blurred. Today, analyzing the reflections of these ideological divisions through exploring the views of trade unions about the Kurdish question can shed a new light on both class and the Kurdish movement.

In this study, therefore, we aim to answer the question of “*How do members of trade unions—as class based organizations—interpret the Kurdish question in Turkey?*” in order to understand what kind of a relation can be made between class and ethnic identities. In addition, we want to analyze how theoretical discussions find a place in practice, by questioning:

- how do unions and their members define the working class in terms of its position in economy, society and politics, and who fits into the working class?
- how do they position unionism in class movements?
- how do they consider the evolution of class concept and unionism?
- how do they compare class movements with identity movements?
- how do they define the Kurdish question in terms of its causes and consequences?
- how do they consider everyday practices of Kurds in the working place and the union?

In doing so, we chose two trade unions in Turkey; Petrol-İş and Hava-İş, which are the similar cases in terms of their unionist stance. Paying regard to effects of the strike of Hava-İş, we want to understand how similar unionist stance/class definitions reflect on their interpretation of the Kurdish question to learn *whether class identity is capable of interacting with other forms of oppression; the oppression of Kurds*. If it is not, we want to understand *how lack of self-identification with the working class reflects on the views on the Kurdish question*. In order to answer these, several interview questions are asked to the union managers and the members.

At the theoretical level, the study, firstly, seeks to analyze the approaches on class, the arguments on failure of class, and class and ethnicity interaction, in the second chapter. The third chapter gives a historical background of the unionism and the Kurdish question in order to provide an understanding about the overlapping points. The fourth chapter analyzes the findings of the conducted research, while these findings are analyzed within the theoretical framework in the conclusion chapter. Through touching on mostly forgotten dimensions of unionism and the Kurdish question, the study will hopefully provide a space for new discussions of class and ethnicity together, both in theory and practice.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

It is debated by many social scientists that the limits of socio-economic classes have been blurred by the emergence of identity politics, and accordingly, the role of class in politics has become less significant (Dunn, 1998; Freidman, 1994,; Melucci, 1985, 1996). These social scientists agree on the idea that the importance of class identity, class consciousness and class movements has substantially decreased since the middle of the 20th century. It is argued that class' being an obsolete factor of social change has gone parallel with the increase of identity-based social movements (Hall, 1989; Pakulski & Waters, 1996).

Not surprisingly, the idea that class politics has been replaced by identity politics is criticized by other social theorists by the claim that class still matters in today's politics (Edgell, 1993; Goldthorpe & Marshall, 1992). Nevertheless, this Marxist claim has different approaches to identity politics. On the one hand, the classical perspective refrains from recognizing identities based on ethnicity, religion, or sex which are thought to be factious for class struggle. On the other hand, it is suggested that class includes some other identities in itself. In recent politics, identity cannot be reduced to a single class identity, but contains different elements which can be grounded on experiences and subjective positions.

Many non-Marxist ideologies which believe in outdate-ness of class in addition to supporting identity politics suggest that ethnicity, one of the forms of identities, has a central role in politics. This idea can be supported by the fact that ethnic conflicts are one of the most widespread conflicts in the post-Cold War era. Thus, it is essential not to deny the existence and significance of the ethnic conflicts which are fed by the clashes of different ethnic identities. In doing so, it is also important to analyze whether ethnic identity suppresses class identity or vice versa. Besides, at the point that defines class as suppressing other identities, it is worthy to examine the relations between class and ethnic identity, and whether they are interacted or not. To do so, this chapter aims to give a theoretical base concerning class and identity politics, and the arguments on the points they separate and overlap.

2.1. The Classical Approach on Class

The Communist Manifesto, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1888, p. 14), states that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”. As what they theoretically call historical materialism, those struggles have always had an economic base, dividing a society into two groups; namely, the oppressor and the oppressed. The ones who hold the means of production have become the oppressor while the ones who only sell their labor in order to live have been the oppressed. Historically, this system has created new names for the clashing groups, maintaining the class antagonisms, but establishing “new classes, new conditions of oppression and new forms of struggle” (Marx & Engels, 1888, p.14). While these groups were feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, and serfs in the Middle Ages, Marx and Engels suggest that the era of industrialization in the 19th century has brought a new dimension in the society; the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. According to them, that dimension has created a sharper split in the society, creating two hostile camps.

On the one side, as the modern capitalists, the bourgeoisie who are the owners of the means of social production and employers of labors on wage, have developed by the industrial development, they have gained a cosmopolitan character in production and consumption in the world. Through the capitalist systems’ spread to all nations, the bourgeoisie have introduced its ideology, naming it as ‘civilization’. In doing so, they have gotten benefit from political centralization with the help of laws, governments and systems of taxation. In other words, the bourgeoisie has created another network through non-productive relations—political, judicial and religious means—(which is defined as *superstructure*), in order to strengthen its position in the economic *base*. Thus, Marx, in the *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1876)* states that “the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life” (para.6). This explanation of the Marxist tradition, therefore, explains the close relationship between economics and politics through underlining the effects of economy on social and political dynamisms.

On the other side, while the capital has grown, the proletariat whose survival depends on the demand for labor, which makes them vulnerable to the competition and

fluctuations of the market, has developed in the same proportion. Concerning these social, political and economic circumstances of the 19th century, Marx and Engels (1888) argue that the growth in number and the growth in exploitation have led the proletariat to be concentrated in masses, being more powerful against the bourgeoisie. They have begun to form organizations—trade unions—in order to struggle against the harsh working conditions and be prepared for some revolts. *The Communist Manifesto* (1888) considers trade unions as a vehicle to organize workers for a bigger worker union which would eventually carry out the proletarian revolution. Keeping up the rates of wages or enhancing the working conditions are not seen as the ultimate aims of trade unions; however, they are significant means of organization and communication among workers from different localities. Defined as a political struggle by Marx and Engels, the struggle of trade unions helps workers to be a class in which the proletariat consciously recognizes their exploited positions in relation to the bourgeoisie. Through class consciousness, trade unions eventually turn into a political party that pursues a legislative struggle for the interests of the working class.

For the ultimate aim, Marx and Engels, in *the Manifesto*, propose a communist revolution for the liberation of the proletariat in order to establish a system in which all members of society participate in production. To do so, the Marxist theory emphasizes a transformation from ‘class in itself’—the economic subject—to ‘class for itself’—the social subject. ‘Class in itself’ refers to its members’ having a common position in the mode of production. So as to pass to ‘class for itself’, members have to be organized in the pursuit of its own interests by class consciousness. This term is defined theoretically by Georg Lukacs (1920), who ideologically theorized Vladimir Lenin’s revolutionary practices. In his work, *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukacs demonstrates “class consciousness consists of the appropriate and rational reactions ‘imputed’ to a particular typical position in the process of production”(1920, para.12). This consciousness is not a sum of thoughts or feelings of single individuals of the class; however, it is acquired based on economic and social circumstances of individuals of the class as a whole. In other words, class consciousness is “subjective awareness people have of their class interests and the conditions for advancing them” as Wright (1999, p. 27) defines. Only if the working class acquires class consciousness, it can be ‘class for itself’ and organized for a political struggle (Marx & Engels, 1976).

The Marxist ideology has provided a theoretical ground for the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The leader of the revolution, Lenin, has developed social, economic and political practices for the application of Marxism in Russia, which later on, has led to the emergence of Leninism. Describing stages to reach communism, in the work of *the State and Revolution* (1917) Lenin sees socialism as the lower stage of communist society. Therefore, he proposes a state governed by the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat, “as the continuation of the class struggle in the new forms”, which will eventually suppress the bourgeoisie and abolish the state (Lenin, 1919, section A.).

Apart from the views on the transition from socialism to communism, Leninism underlines self determination of nations, while Marx and Engels are not very much interested in. Indeed, in the early years of the Revolution, Lenin, in the work of *the Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, recognizes the importance of nationalism among the oppressed, suggesting that “We fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressor nation, and do not in any way condone strivings for privileges on the part of the oppressed nation” (1914b, chap.4). Although he acknowledges internationality of the class struggle, Lenin does not actually consider *all* nationalisms as intellectual obstacles or dividing forces for the proletariat revolution, and supports the right to self-determination of ‘oppressed’ nations in order to break down the bourgeoisie nationalism and to strengthen the working class solidarity across the world.

All in all, the classical approach on class agrees on the social stratification which sharply divides a society into two groups; the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Not surprisingly, different interpretations of Marxism have been shaped historically, in accordance with the circumstances of the era. However, one of the distinctive points in the Marxist tradition, nationalism in a class struggle, has substantially affected today’s discussions to rethink class and ethnic identity together, which will be deeply analyzed later.

2.2. Class as an Obsolete Variable

Beginning with the Marxist tradition, class with its economic 'base' can identify important mechanisms of politics and social structure. Class interests have highly affected politics and ideologies in the 20th century (Kaya & Kaya, 2006). Class is a significant actor shaping party programs along with others. Thus, many political parties have class related positions in their programs, which affect their political ideologies. It has been mostly considered that while the working class is supported by social democratic parties, liberals and conservatives prepare programs compatible with middle class interests (Lipset, 1960). In order to observe the relations between class positions and voting behavior, for example, Lipset made statistical research which showed that after the Second World War, the middle class of Britain and the USA was tended to vote for right wing parties, whereas lower classes tended to vote for left wing parties (Lipset, 1960).

Some recent statistics, however, suggest that politics is less likely to be influenced by class relations in today's world. For example, correlation between voting behavior and class interests has substantially decreased, and ties between political parties and class has been loosened (Clark & Lipset, 1991). On the contrary to what Lipset found in 1960, Clark and he argue, in 1991, that class has become insufficient to understand new political and social processes due to the collapse of old hierarchies, such as the hierarchy between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The boundaries of class divisions introduced by the classical approach have been blurred. The reasons for the failure of class are claimed as the rise of the welfare state, which raises affluence, diversification of the occupational structure (political rise of the middle class) that also creates institutional based class divisions, and changes of political party dynamics (Clark et al, 2001). Concerning social sides of those changes, social stratification of the West has become more pluralistic, being outside of class relations. The definitions of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie have largely lost its validity through a 'more institution based structure' which is mainly determined by different levels of education. Pihl (2009), who touches upon the views of Melucci on new social movements states that rather than economic class rights, mass education and extended citizenship rights are considered as more attractive to individuals in advanced industrialized societies to

increase their capacities in order to create their own sense of identities. On the political side, in the new pluralistic political environment, class does not provide a sharp contrast between left and right wing political parties. Hence, today's political parties mostly concentrate on 'social value issues' rather than class, concerning such as ethnicity, human rights, or environment, generally accepting the market economy, in accordance with the new social circumstances and demands of individuals.

In a similar way, Pakulski and Waters (1996) in their book *The Death of Class*, by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the decline of socialist ideologies in the West, "class is losing its ideological significance and political centrality" (p.1). Hence, the right wing parties are more likely to be interested in morality and ethnicity, while the left is concerned with gender, environment and human rights. Although the fact that class is being disfavored by intellectual and public fashion is not an objective criterion, Pakulski and Waters (1996) find it useful to make a broader analysis to explain social structure. According to them, classical approaches on class have a consensus that class is primarily related with 'property and/or market relations', which categorizes people as producers, but not consumers, members of ethnic or gender categories, or position holders (Pakulski and Waters, 1996). Traditional class analysis, therefore, loses its explanatory power in today's societies in which classes in the classical sense are dissolving, through not going far from those economic-productive relations, and not explaining current social, political and economic dynamics. These dynamics are listed by the authors, very similarly with Clark and Lipset, as,

- Changes in the structure of work and employment, especially post-Fordist forms of flexible specialization;
- the globalization of market relations and rapid rise of Asian tiger economies and dragon societies;
- the original growth and the current decomposition of the welfare state;
- partisan dealignment and the demise of corporatist politics, and
- changing forms of identification and political action, in particular the rising tide of new politics (Pakulski & Waters, 1996, p. 151).

The listed issues that are considered as declining the credibility of the traditional class analysis, moreover, loosen class imaginary in the minds, psychologically and socially. Politically, they lead class to be incapable of explaining current conflicts in

which “national, religious, local, regional, ethnic, gender, racial and sexual preference identities are much more important” (Pakulski & Waters, 1996, p. 152).

Agreeing with the emergence of new identities, Hall’s position in the formation of identities, to some extent, differs from what Melucci contends concerning desires of individuals to formulate the sense of identity which is ‘free of external state or corporate coercion’ (Philon, 2009, p. 83). In explaining Marxist theory of identity, Hall agrees on the idea that “there are always conditions to identity which the subject cannot construct” (1989, p. 11). Since those conditions tend to change by time, the sense of identity of individuals accordingly changes, but still in a constructed way. In terms of collective identities, this new construction has shaken lots of ‘past’ identities, such as class. In a more cautious way than Clark & Lipset (2001) and Pakulski & Waters (1996), Hall does not believe that class identity has completely gone away. However, he thinks,

“The way in which class identities were understood and experienced, the way in which people located themselves in relation to class identities, the way in which we understood those identities as organized politically—those stable forms of class identity are much more difficult to find at this point in the 20th century than they were 100 years ago”(Hall, 1989, p.13).

Not going in details of the reasons behind that, he makes a conclusion that all identities, including class and the more popular ones (ethnicity and gender), which are mostly considered as stable are not stable, indeed. Hence, they are all exposed to construction by changes through time. The fact in the 1960s that each social movement had a single identity (woman, labor or Black) is not valid today (Hall, 1989).

2.3. Class Still Matters

Wright (1996), in his work, “*Continuing Relevance of Class Analysis*”, challenges the ideas of Pakulski & Waters on the death of class. He aims to show how the evidences which are introduced by these authors are not sufficient to prove the irrelevance of class. In doing so, he starts with the class definition, which is explained as a mere economic phenomenon by Pakulski & Waters. According to Wright (1996), the class analysis emphasizes that class is also a cultural and political concept. In fact, more importantly, he does not agree with the point criticized by Pakulski & Waters that class as an economic phenomenon is fundamental in the social structure. Most Marxists

do not agree that class as an economic concept is fundamental in organizing and structuring social organization. In fact, in the explanation of base and superstructure, class is situated in base which constitutes economy. In superstructure, there is everything else concerning society which might or might not be related with class relations. Class does not have to be the most important predictor, but still provides to identify important mechanisms.

Those important mechanisms are indicated by Wright's work through analyzing other subjectivities—friendship formation and household relations—which are emphasized by identity politics in which individual preferences matter. He finds out that merely class locations do not produce different forms of subjectivities, but they do shape subjectivities in interaction with other processes, such as “institutional arrangements, political strategies of parties and unions, historical legacies of the past struggles” (Wright, 1996, p. 710). Thus, class is still powerful in explaining many aspects of social life. Especially, class boundaries which also affect individual preferences continue to constitute real barriers in people's lives with the unequal distribution of the capital.

Concerning the rise of the middle class, which is considered as a reason for the decline of traditional class divisions, Wright (1997) suggests that ‘the new middle class’—as mentioned by some theorists—is divided into two groups; skilled and non-skilled white collar workers. Both of these groups work for big firms (e.g. managers) or state institutions (e.g. doctors, teachers). They might be considered as the members of the working class, since they sell their labor in order to live. In fact, they can also be counted as the members of the capitalist class, because they have the authority to control the workers (Wright, 1997). He states that “some positions have multiple class character” (Wright, 1985, p.43). Despite various arguments on the conceptualization of these categories, it should be admitted that emergence of the new categories have created a new dimension in the working class, and they have gained the status of being a political subject for themselves. It is, however, less likely that it holds the power for a whole political transformation of the society, since the white collar workers are less powerful in comparison to the working or the capitalist classes by being in the middle of

the two main classes, and due to the uncertainty of their class locations (Kaya & Kaya, 2006).

Leaving aside the complexities of the recent conceptualization of the class and going back to the classical Marxism, Marx's categorization of labor includes people who are described as the members of the new middle class (managers/doctors). He argues,

“labour-power socially combined and the various competing labour-powers which together form the entire production machine participate in very different ways in the immediate process of making commodities... Some work better with their hands, others with their heads, one as a manager, engineer, technologist, etc, the other as overseer, the third as manual labourer or even drudge. An ever-increasing number of types of labour are included in the immediate concept of productive labour, and those who perform it are classed as productive workers, workers directly exploited by capital and subordinated to its process of production and expansion” (Marx, 1976, p. 1039-1040).

As opposed to the claims that educational attainments widen class differentials, and have become more important in determining class, Goldthorpe & Marshall (1992) argue that there is no reduction of class inequalities through high level of education. They demonstrate that if different education levels have diminished class divisions, the advantaged classes could pass their family resources to their children through other channels, without education. In other words, a child could gain her/his position in the advantaged class of her/his family although she/he is not highly educated as his/her parents. Hence, education levels that are increased by the rise of welfare state in advanced societies do not necessarily challenge class locations in the longer run, on the contrary to what Melucci and Clark & Lipset (1991 and 2001) underline education as the cause for ‘the failure of class’.

Namely, the scholars who believe in the important and powerful existence of class in today's politics try to challenge the claims which are proposed as the causes of ‘the death of class’. Although Wright (1996; 1997) and Goldthorpe & Marshall (1992) agree on the impacts of those changes in the social and political arenas, they notably underline that class should be thought in consideration with its dynamics which are naturally influenced with the circumstances of the era. As opposed to the agreement on

dynamism of class relations, the notion of 'identities in class' has created a dichotomy in Marxism; whether class does/should suppress other identities, or class can contain multiple subjectivities.

2.3.1. Class as Suppressing Identities

After the Communist Manifesto was written in 1848, a committee which Marx and Engels joined declared the demands of the Communist Party in Germany. This declaration began with the statement that "Workers of all countries, unite!" Although this famous statement was written in a declaration which was prepared for Germany, it signals the unifying nature of the class concept. For the liberation of the proletariat, Marxism offers the working class solidarity in which people from all nations, ethnicities, religions or sexes should join the class struggle. The proletariat should not let the bourgeoisie weaken their struggle through splitting them by those antagonisms. Marx underlines this issue in the discussions of the "Irish Question." In 1870, for example, he wrote,

"The English bourgeoisie has not only exploited the Irish poverty to keep down the working class in England by forced immigration of poor Irishmen, but it has also divided the proletariat into two hostile camps...This antagonism among the proletarians of England is artificially nourished and supported by the bourgeoisie. It knows that this scission is the true secret of maintaining its power" (Marx and Engels 1972, p. 162).

This approach is interpreted in different ways in the recent politics; class suppresses other identities, or embodies them. Bill Mullen (2002), for example, suggests that identity politics are incompatible or even harmful for class transformation. In accordance with the Marxist tradition, he states that "the first step toward working-class emancipation is the recognition by workers that they must lose, not gain their identity and identification with capitalism, nationalism, imperialism, and other capitalist processes" (2002, p.38). In order to move beyond capitalism, identities are chains which should be gotten riden of. He formulates a similar slogan with the Manifesto that "workers and working-class studies scholars of the world unite! You have nothing

to lose but your identities!’’ (2002, p. 41). In the very similar way with Mullen, Schocket finds identity politics not only dangerous, but also inherently incoherent for class politics, stating,

“The identitarian position cannot embrace class in its Marxian sense as dynamic and ultimately self-negating, as a set of operations we struggle to overturn rather than as a set of voices or, indeed, a “culture” that we rediscover and honor. Put as simply as possible, since class can only name a relational inequity that is intolerable, it cannot comfortably fit into a system that is formulated with the opposite agenda: the positive valuation of difference”. (Schocket, 2000, p. 4)

Sharon Smith, in a speech called “*Marxism and Identity Politics*” (2008), states that the nature of identity politics causes antagonisms between oppressed groups, without having no reason to fight with each other. Although she indicates that she fully understands the personal experiences of people who are oppressed by being ‘women, gay or black’, and supports the movements against racism, homophobia and sexism, Smith (2008) thinks that those movements are not enough to change the system. In her analysis, she underlines that identities mostly remain in the personal level, but move into the political arena when they become tools for fighting against oppression as a strategy for changing society. The point which is undermined by identity politics is that people do not have to have personal experiences of oppression to be able to resist it. Through emphasizing the idea that people who only experience a particular identity based oppression are able to fight against it while the others cannot be a part of the solution; because they are the causes of the problem, identity politics do formulate antagonism which leads to ignore the systematic oppression. In fact, she states "oppression is not caused by the race, gender or sexuality of particular individuals who run the system, but is generated by the very system itself—no matter who's running it” (Smith, 2008).

2.3.2. *Multiple subjectivities in class*

While some of the Marxist scholars agree on harms of the identity politics for class, but not being very firm or clear in suppressing the other identities, the other contemporary Marxists argue that class in the Marxist terminology can contain multiple

identities, including a worker identity. As Özselçuk (2006) discusses that worker identity is generally formed of 'wounded attachments' to the past and present injuries that have morally positive but materially negative sentiments. Internalization of self suffering leads to looking back with nostalgia and creates *ressentiment*. In defense of the threatened and suppressed worker identity, workers obtain a site of mourning (Özselçuk, 2006) which equates their loss caused by capitalism with pain, self-pity and anger due to their failure. Gibson-Graham (2001) moreover underline that " [...] the foreclosure of class transformation when, faced with the processes of economic restructuring, class struggle retreats to a nostalgic defense of a threatened worker identity and confines the scope of resistance to preserving the old ways of being, hence deflects any real change from taking place" (Özselçuk, 2006 p.226). It is, therefore, argued that these wounded attachments simultaneously become the essential components of worker identities, which weaken the possibility of transforming those conditions, but leading to continuation of capitalism. On the other hand, formation of these subjectivities with acknowledgment of pain might be a necessary step for creating ties empathetically with injured communities and provides them with consciousness of loss to move on the next stage against capitalism. Even, the multiple subjectivities might contribute value to the class politics positively to break with capitalism (Özselçuk, 2006). In line with that argument, Althusser (1979) suggests that attachments and feeling coming from the past are very constructive and affective as a step for organizing new—non capitalist—economic identifications. Although Hall (1989) believes in the unpopularity of class identities today, he makes a similar argument concerning the sense of identity. He states that “You have to position yourself in somewhere in order to say anything about it...People need to honor hidden histories from which they come” (p. 18). Hence, it would be wrong to want workers to forget their past injuries which are helpful to formulate identities.

These past injuries do not have to be related with economic-based experiences. In the book, *Class and its Others*, Gibson-Graham et al. (2000) discuss that class can participate in transforming economic and *other* social relations. Hence, instead of ignoring class in non-economic identities or non-economic identities in class, class politics should create new forms of politics to respond new desires. Each identity can be understood by the complex of “natural, social, economic, cultural, political and other

processes” (Gibson-Graham, et al, 2000, p.7). None of these should be considered as having fundamental importance alone. This claim is, moreover, consistent with what Wright (1996) underlines that most Marxists do not see class as fundamental, but it provides a broader explanation for the social and political structure. Thus, as Gibson-Graham et al. (2000) state that “we can see class processes being enacted in multiple forms and social sites—not just in the capitalist enterprise but in non-capitalist ones (including identities of gender, ethnicity and so on)” (p. 10).

Through recognizing the recent concerns of cultural identity, scholars who do not undermine the importance of class begin to “focus on how cultural processes are embedded within specific kinds of socio-economic practices, exploring how inequality is routinely reproduced through both cultural and economic practices” (Devine & Savage, 2000, p.193-196). Hence, there is an emphasis on how class is experienced in gendered and raced ways (Reay, 1998, p. 272). This academic shift is, for example, seen in Wright’s works. In his work *Race, Class, and Income Inequality*, in 1978, he suggests that although the class dynamics (with an economic base) may undermine racial differences in the labor market, “To the extent that the working class is divided along racial and ethnic lines, the collective power of the working class is reduced, and thus the capacity of workers to win demands against capital is decreased” (p.1391).

In sum, the concern of identity in the leftist ideology creates an axis between revolutionary and instrumentalist politics. While the former believes in the factious nature of identities, the latter supports the necessity of considering economic definition class with political definition of personal/cultural identities, which needs ‘re-subjectivation with the past, present and future’ (Özselçuk, 2006, p.238).

2.4. Class and Ethnicity Interaction

In the academic realm of multiple subjectivities in class, ethnicity is one of the most important subjectivities which influences today’s politics. Hall (1989), for example, gives an emphasis on subjectivation with the past which is fed by ethnic identity. In the similar logic with forming a worker identity with the past injuries, discussed by Özselçuk, Hall (1989, p.18) demonstrates that “[...] we cannot do without the sense of positioning that is connoted by the term of ethnicity. And the relation that

peoples of the world now have to their own past is, of course, part of the discovery of their own ethnicity”. According to him, the ethnic past which shapes today’s identity is constructed politically. Although he does not explicitly underline, economic impacts to that construction seem to be inevitable. Thus, it is worthy to discuss how ethnicity finds a place in the new definition of class, which affects and be affected by other subjectivities.

In his book, *Class, Ethnicity and Social Inequality* (1990), Christopher McAll describes the importance of thinking class and ethnicity together for social inequality, by stating that

“They are both key concepts in any discussion that takes social inequality as the general problem that is being addressed. Ethnicity, for all its vagueness, relates to the way in which people identify themselves as either belonging or not belonging to particular ethnic groups, and is therefore of central importance to the way in which people socialize, vote, fight, cooperate or otherwise translate their beliefs into action. At the same time we cannot understand social phenomena without classifying, particularly in the context of social inequality” (McAll, 1990, p. 4-5)

This idea brings the claim that one of the forms of social inequalities; ethnic conflicts, therefore, are mostly in relation with class conflicts, as well. As Özbudun (2010) discusses, each case in which ethnicity is visible (or more or less under tension) signals unequal economic-political relations, at the same time. Thus, ethnic problems mostly come to the scene when the minority groups encounter or feel economic-political discrimination against them (Özbudun, 2010). It is explained due to the fact that each ethnic minority, experiencing a historical inequality, has a *classified* position.

This argument was discussed much earlier, in the 1930s, to analyze the relations between the North and the South in the United States. Conceptualized as ‘internal colonialism’, the idea underlines the existent “analogy between the situation of colonial domination and the position of racial and ethnic communities within industrial societies” (Stone, 1979, p. 278). As the pioneer of the argument, Hechter (1975) claims that ethnic tensions arise when minorities are deliberately deprived of social and economic advantages by systematic discrimination of the majority, in the fields of education, employment and living standards. Thus, classical colonialist system which exploits overseas countries materially continues internally in the industrial states in

which a stratified system is founded by unequal distribution of power and resources among the ethnic groups. The uneven development of capitalism eventually causes the fact that “longstanding ethnic resentments by the minority group against the hegemony of the dominant group crystallize into a nationalist movement for sociopolitical and economic change” (Byrne & Irvin, 2002, p. 59).

In order to show the relation between capitalism and ethnic conflicts, Çiçek (2012) touches upon one of the features of capitalism: unequal development. He argues that unequal geographical development of capitalism leads to build a regional construction of the capital and different scales of center-periphery relations through inter-geographical labor force and transfers of raw materials (Çiçek, 2012). While the center has the capacity of high technology and production, the periphery provides raw materials, agricultural production and cheap labor force. In this process, capitalism produces regional disparities in between developed-undeveloped countries, developed-undeveloped cities and suburbs in cities (Smith, 1990). It is important to note that unequally developed geographies are also cultural geographies. Hence, differentiations between economical geographies are, often, intersected with differentiations between cultural geographies (Çiçek, 2012). Intersection of class based inequalities and ethnic conflicts, therefore, becomes inevitable. In that line, Çiçek (2012) quotes Beşikçi (1992);

“[...] those two realities have thoroughly appeared in the sociological studies,

1. Any analysis which is not done with regard to social classes is not meaningful, and cannot be successful in solving problems.
2. Any analysis which does not take into consideration interregional economic and social unbalance, and does not analyze ethnic factors with regard to classes is incomplete” (as cited in Çiçek, 2012, p.13)

All in all, although in the Marxist tradition, fist ideology does not underline class and ethnicity interaction, it might signal the existence of ethnic identities in class struggles by supporting the liberation of the oppressed nations. In the contemporary world, theories about multiple subjectivities in class deserve an attention to analyze class and ethnicity interactions, since those interactions affect today’s ethnic conflicts in accordance with the new definitions of class.

2.5. The Conclusion

The popularity of class as a predictor which explains social stratification having an economic base has risen during some historical moments or declined in some other periods. Until the 1980s, the Classical Marxist approach on class has continued its popularity in the academic realm. In accordance with the political and economic conjuncture of the world, however, it is argued that new indicators which stratify society, such as ethnic, religious or sexual identities, have made socio-economic class weaken its validity (Clark & Lipset, 1991, Clark et al, 2001, Pakulski & Waters, 1996,; Dunn, 1998,; Freidman, 1994,; Melucci, 1985, 1996).

Although the Marxist side, after the 1980s agree on the idea that class is still an important variable to understand social stratification (Wright, 1996, 1997,; Goldthorpe & Marshall, 1992), its influence is somehow ambiguous concerning identity issues. While some scholars think that other identities rather than class are factious for class movements (Mullen, 2002,; Schocket, 2000,; Smith, 2008), others suggest that class can have multiple subjectivities, including ethnic, religious, sexual identities, which might be even helpful for a class movement (Gibson-Graham, 2001; Özselçuk, 2006; Althusser, 1979).

In accordance with the argument of multiple subjectivities in class, the relationship between class and ethnicity is worthy to examining. Oppression of the proletariat and oppression of the ethnic minorities are mostly intertwined when ethnic conflicts, which mostly have an economic side, are considered. Even, some non-Marxists have recognized that the relationship between ethnicity and class constitutes the key to an understanding of ethnic conflicts (Van de Berghe, 1975, p.75), “Oliver Cox, even in 1949, had already placed ethnicity within the context of power, political ideology and class” (as cited in Bourgois, 1988, p. 328). Class with its renewed definitions which do not go very far away from its origin, therefore, is in relation with the ‘newer’ dimension: ethnicity.

CHAPTER III: TRADE UNIONS AND THE KURDISH QUESTION IN TURKEY

3.1. Trade Unions

The first section of this chapter aims to explain mainly two periods of unionism in Turkey; the 1960s-1980s and the 1980s-today through understanding their ties with political ideologies and political parties. Giving clues about validity and popularity of class in social stratification, this tie will help to comprehend trade unions' views on the Kurdish question which will be deeply analyzed in the second section of the chapter.

Trade unions are defined, by the Marxist tradition, as means of organization for the proletariat struggle which would come to an end by the communist revolution. Trade unions have been mostly moved away from this definition and survived in the capitalist societies in order to protect and enhance workers rights and working conditions today. They have, however, gained a political character, from time to time, promoting 'the working class struggle' for which unions attempted to take action in the fields of economy, politics, and society.

In the Turkish context, unionism was legalized in 1946 by the abolition of an article of the Associations Law of 1924 which prohibited organization based on classes. In 1947, however, trade unions which were organized with the help of some socialist parties were closed since the government found class unionism dangerously politicized (Mahiroğulları, 2003). By the 1960s, unionism in Turkey gained a more powerful stance, grounding on workers rather than political authorities in accordance their major roles. As unionism attracted more workers, socialist political parties started to have closer relations with trade unions. Especially, the left-wing parties of the 1970s in Turkey had very powerful ties with the working class, and were effective on worker and unionist movements (Şafak, 2013). After the 1980 Military Coup, unionism was weakened through the legal limitations and neo-liberal economic policies, and relations between political party and trade unions were transformed. In line with the argument that 'class as an obsolete variable', unionism's academic popularity has declined after the 1980s, too. However, it is not very difficult to claim that some Turkish trade unions,

today, have dissidence on political ideologies, which affects their relations with political parties and struggle against the capitalist.

3.1.1. Unionism in the 1960s-80s

3.1.1.1. *The Background*

By the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the Kemalist ideology promoted an interventionist role in the economy in order to reach rapid industrialization through making reforms, which were designed to control or restrain the working class organizations. To do so, by the Labor Code of 1936, the right for workers and employers to found unions or associations, particularly in economic sectors was abolished. Consequently, forming associations based on class interests was prohibited by the Law of Associations of 1938 (Keyder, 1987). In addition, these policies supported the industrial growth by low wages and long working hours, which would lead to declining the working class support for the Republican People's Party, the CHP¹.

The attempts for democratization² by introducing multi-party system and the US pressures for democratization, the discontent with the single party rule and socio-economic transformations of Turkey somewhat activated the working class activism (Mello, 2007). The opposition parties—especially the Democrat Party (the DP)—tried to take an advantage from these circumstances through attracting the working class. During the discussions on the Labor Law in the Parliament, for example, the DP

¹ The CHP was founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who was the founding leader of the Turkish Republic. It grounded its ideology on the six principles; nationalism, republicanism, secularism, etatism, populism, reformism, which underlies the Kemalist ideology.

² During the single party rule governed by the CHP, although parliamentary regime was in force, both the government and the parliament were formed by the CHP, without a democratic structure in today's understanding. Beginning in 1919, the single party period lasted to 1946 when the Democrat Party, the DP, joined in the elections.

passionately advocated the workers' right to strike which increased its prestige in the eyes of the workers (Mahiroğulları, 2003). In response to this support, the CHP government, in 1946, removed permission requisites for forming associations, and the ban on forming class based associations³

The first wave unionism was mainly headed by socialist people and parties, such as the Socialist Party of Turkey (the TSP) and the Socialist Worker and Peasant Party of Turkey (the TSEKP). In 1946, the CHP government, however, suspected those trade unions and political parties by accusing them for “being fanatic communists who implicitly intended to ruin the order” (Sülker, 1976, p.60), and closed them in the same year, 1946. Although the CHP criticized these trade unions for having direct relations with the political parties it formed partisan trade unions⁴ or tried to attract the existent unions, after enacting the Trade Union Act in 1947⁵. The DP chose the same way with the CHP through founding opponent trade unions⁶ in spite of the legal ban on political activity of trade unions. After the victory of the DP in the general elections of 1950, however, it did not even introduce a bill to legalize the right to strike during its ten-year-governance.

Despite the dependency of trade unions on the political parties on power, the CHP or the DP, important steps for labor movement were taken in this period, especially with the foundation of the first national confederation, the Confederation of Turkish Labor Unions (TURK-IS), in 1952. In accordance with the political and economic atmosphere of Turkey, with the help of the financial support of the US which aimed to balance employee-employer relations in industrial societies to prevent ‘marginalization’—referring to being away from the Soviet system—, the working class organizations were strengthened, and TURK-IS had a significant growth in number in ten years. However, free unionism was doubtful, since

³ In accordance with the law no. 4919, 5 June 1946 (Mahiroğulları, 2005, p.53).

⁴ For example, İstanbul Labor Unions Association was founded under the guidance of the CHP in 1948 (Işıklı, 1995, p.159).

⁵ The law no. 5018 on 20 February 1947 (Mahiroğulları, 2005, p.58).

⁶ Free Labor Unions Association, founded in 1950 (Mahiroğulları, 2003, p.5).

“DP officials recognized the emergence of TURK-IS, as an opportunity to cut off any militancy of rank-and-file union members and control the union movement through ties with its leadership. Subsequently, the DP aligned with TURK-IS, in a semi-corporatist relationship...In essence, in an effort to prevent political action based on class interests, the state, under the DP, continued to control and limit the political action of working-class organizations” (Mello, 2007, p.216).

Although the DP period provided legislation aimed to benefit the working class interests, such as “paid weekends, a minimum wage and extensions of the scope of social security” (Koç, 1999, p.36-37), it maintained state dependent unionism, like the CHP.

3.1.1.2. The Political Atmosphere and Trade Unions in the 1960s

The Military coup of the 1960⁷ ended the DP government undemocratically; however, it opened up a way for liberalized governance of Turkey with a liberalized constitution. After the Coup, the constituent assembly which included six worker representatives prepared a constitutional draft that was adopted on 9 July 1961 (Mahiroğulları, 2005). The new constitution defined the Turkish state as a social state, guaranteeing the protection of freedoms and rights of the Turkish people. Labor organizations were also encouraged by the provisions of the right to organize, strike and collective bargaining⁸ (Yazıcı, 2003). The absolute ban on political activities of trade unions was loosened, since during the discussion on the 1961 Constitution, it was stated that an absolute ban on political activities of trade unions prevented free unionism and caused threats for its development (Tuncay, 1981).

Economic policies after the Coup also shaped the social and political environment. Unlike the DP era, economic policies were grounded on a planned base in line with the social state understanding, which gave a rise to industrialization and

⁷ The 1960 coup took place by the Turkish army under the leadership of Cemal Gürsel. Mainly accused of violating the constitution, three statemen, including the prime minister Adnan Menderes were executed.

⁸ It is important to note that these rights were also aquisitons of big worker demonstrations and strikes which put pressure to the government, such as the Saraçhane demonstration and the Kavel Resistance that were headed by TURK-IS.

caused a social change by modernization and urbanization (Koray, 1994). Consequently, the numerical growth of workers by the economic and social transformation, and the liberal political atmosphere facilitated workers organizations. As Karpas (1973) demonstrates, “the constitutional rights granted to labor, the sympathetic intellectual interests in the workers’ problems, the regime of freedom after the elections of 1961, and the weak coalition governments from 1961 to 1965 created favorable conditions for labor activities” (p. 273).

In accordance with these developments, the idea of forming a political party to advocate workers rights in the Parliament by some unionists⁹ could be put in practice in 1961. The first workers’ party was called the Workers’ Party of Turkey (the TIP). When it was criticized with not having a clear and sufficient organization plan, the TIP decided to attract and call upon such intellectuals as Nadir Nadi, Yaşar Kemal, Mehmet Ali Aybar, to have them in the party administration. Consequently, M. Ali Aybar was elected as the president of the TIP in 1962. Although the party code of the TIP did not have any discourse related to socialism in its first year, its ideology was clearly shaped along the socialist line by M. Ali Aybar (Mahiroğulları, 2005). The foundation of the TIP by the unionists and its socialist line brought a new dimension to unionism through introducing ideological unionism, which helped the working class to be politicized in a socialist manner. The 68 spirit which began in the mid-1960s by the leftist/socialist youth movement, moreover, supported the politicization of the working class and unionism (Şafak, 2013).

Under the leadership of the TIP, a single-handed and socialist class struggle in Turkey was aimed. At this point some members of TIP clashed with TURK-İŞ who drafted *the axiom of Politics of above Parties* and adopted ‘patriotic unionism’¹⁰ (Özuğurlu, 1994, p. 181). TURK-İŞ accused some TIP members in the confederation of

⁹ These union leaders, especially within the body of Istanbul Labor Unions Association, were Kemal Türkler, Avni Erakalın, Şaban Yıldız, Salih Özkarabay, İbrahim Güzelce, Ahmet Muşlu, Rıza Kuas, Kemal Nebioğlu, Hüseyin Uslubaş, Saffet Göksüzoğlu, Adnan Arıkan, İbrahim Denizciler (Koç, 2000, p. 129).

¹⁰ This rhetoric is explained by Özuğurlu (1994) that TURK-İŞ, actually, did not aim to be away from politics. On the contrary, by being closer to the governments, it defined itself as patriotic.

being communist and rejected their new understanding of unionism, called as syndicalism (class unionism), which “advocated pragmatic adoption and use of a mix of liberal and socialist ideas, all for the workers’ interest” (Blind, 2007, p. 294-295). These ideological clashes and isolations of TIP members from TURK-IS encouraged TIP members¹¹ to form a new confederation, the Revolutionary Labor Unions Confederation (DISK) in 1967. The main reasons of this split were explained as “first, TURK-IS was not a genuine worker organization; second, TURK-IS was based on American aid; and third, TURK-IS’s adherence to *the axiom of Politics of above Parties* did not work as intended¹²” (Blind, 2007, p. 295). In line with the TIP, DISK aimed to and worked for a socialist class struggle rather than reconciliatory unionism.

Unionism and the socialist left, therefore, went together in the 1960s, which strengthened the both. This togetherness improved class awareness of workers, as Mello (2007) summarizes that

“Labor movement activists did interpret the early 1960s as an opportunity for advancing movement activism. Taken together, these aspects of labor activism in the early 1960s indicate how labor activists expanded their effort to link together previously unconnected elements of the Turkish the working class, as well as to establish new boundaries of the working class solidarity based on socialist ideas” (Mello, 2007, p. 221).

3.1.1.3. *The Era of ‘Active’ Unionism; the 1970s*

The rise and improvement of unionism in the 1960s led it to be practiced most efficiently and rapidly in the 1970s. One of the significant actors of this improvement was undoubtedly DISK (Şafak, 2013). After its foundation, for example, it was stated by a DISK representative that

¹¹ The founding administrative body of DISK consisted of some of the founders of the TIP, for example Kemal Türkler, İbrahim Güzelce, Rıza Kuas and Kemal Nebioğlu (Mahiroğulları, 2005, p. 190).

¹² This reason was explained in the way that TURK-IS had a tendency of having close relations with the parties on power (Sülker, 1969, p. 87-88).

“Our confederation’s strengthening of the working class in the country’s administration will vanquish slavery and establish an order with the goal of equality and brotherhood from every direction, and will guarantee that the working class will play an influential role in [solving] the country’s problems” (cited in Mello, 2007, p. 222).

In that era, the 15th -16th September (Worker) Resistance in 1970 passed into Turkish history as one of the biggest political general strikes. In 1970, the government of the AP (the Justice Party) passed a bill to change the 1963 Unions Law, aiming to limit the freedom of choosing a union and damage DISK¹³. Under the leadership of DISK, mass demonstrations of workers took place especially in Istanbul, Kocaeli and Ankara. Some members of TURK-IS also participated in the march, and the resistance went beyond DISK and unionism. The left took lessons from this resistance, and unionist/socialist theorization was grounded on the idea that class struggle had to be led by the working class (Şafak, 2013). In line with these events, after the TIP’s application to the Constitutional Court for the law’s cancellation, the law on higher thresholds for forming a federation has been cancelled.

After the cancellation of the law, the rise of leftist ideologies in unionism took a fast phase. In 1974, MADEN-IŞ (the union of mine workers) opened a new way with a socialist cadre. Similarly, in 1975, DISK chose İbrahim Güzelce as the general secretary and Aydın Meriç who was a member of TKP Politburo (the Turkish Communist Party) as the vice general secretary (Şafak, 2013). In the years between 1975 and 1977, the TKP dominated DISK and MADEN-IŞ with its revisionist line. Under the dominance of the TKP, DISK headed significant mass and political labor demonstrations. It organized a big campaign for democratic rights and freedoms, in 1975; provided the 1st May with being celebrated legally in 1976; organized a big resistance against state security courts in 1976; and educated its members to improve their class and organization consciousness (Mahiroğulları, 2005). Although DISK was accused of being responsible of the 1st May 1977 demonstration (the bloody 1st May) in which 37 people died; a

¹³ The government was uncomfortable with the competition between DISK and TURK-IS, and chosed to close down DISK through setting high theresholds for forming a federation (Şafak, 2013, p.125). It was also claimed that TURK-IS cooperated with the AP for this bill (Aydoğanoğlu, online <http://www.ozgurlukdunyasi.org/arsiv/313-sayi-245/1095-60li-yillarda-isci-sinifi-mucadelesi-ve-DISKin-kurulus-sureci>)

month later, MADEN-İŞ organized the ‘Big Strike’¹⁴ against MESS (the Turkish Metal Industrialists Union) (Şafak, 2013). The Big Strike lasted for six months with the participation of nearly 20 thousand workers in 63 workplaces (Şafak, 2012). However, political and ideological divergence in the management cadre of DISK and its member unions continued, which led some unionists to be purged. On the one hand, the split¹⁵ among the left provided with diversity, creativeness and efficiency for unionism. In these years, collective bargaining in which competition was very effective was substantially prosperous. On the other hand, the competition among them—especially, the TKP versus the TIP—lead to disunity, damaging the leftist politics and unionist movements.

Aiming a bigger and powerful organization, in 1977, the chairman of DISK, Kemal Türkler made an appeal regarding ‘the National Democratic Front’ (UDC) which was a political document of the TKP. It was stating

“The National Front—the rightist coalition in the government—is the most reactionary and fascist front of the capitalist. It is an immediate duty to gather in the UDC for people in the parliament or in organizations who support national independence, democracy, peace and social development, in order to prevent the 2nd National Front” (cited in Fuat, 2008, online)

Although this appeal attracted the TKP side in DISK and some other organizations, it caused a power struggle among different fractions. Consequently, Abdullah Baştürk—known as pro-CHP—was elected as the chairman of DISK after the UDC appeal, which largely weakened the socialist era in DISK.

In spite of the ideological fluctuations in unionism, *class and mass unionism* came into practice in the 1970s, mainly led by the socialist unionists. In the same line with the Marxist definition of trade unions, this concept ensured that unions harbored only the

¹⁴ One of the reasons of the Big Strike which is interpreted as a ‘battle’ was to re-hire the workers who were fired due to the state security court resistance (Şafak, 2013, p. 133).

¹⁵ In addition to the splits in the leftist unions, the rightist front formed unions and confederations, too. The MHP (the Nationalist Action Party) founded MİSK (the Nationalist Labor Unions Confederation) in 1970, and the MSP (the National Salvation Party) established HAK-İŞ (the Confederation of Turkish Just Workers) in 1976 (Blind, 2007, p.295).

working class, and took part in the economic, political and ideological struggle of the working class. Through adopting class and mass unionism, “DISK, on the one side, claimed that all workers regardless of their political opinion, world view, religion, language and race could be the part of mass organization; on the other side, it demonstrated that unions had to struggle in the light of socialism” (Şafak, 2013, p.131). In this direction, mass strikes in the 1970s, which included action collaborations of unions from different confederations¹⁶ were organized in the process of collective bargaining and carried out big strikes. These actions compassed a substantial part or the whole of a work line with a very big worker population, being politically, economically and socially influential across the country.

3.1.2. Unionism after the 1980s

3.1.2.1. *The Military Coup and its Effects on Unionism in the 1980s*

On September 12, 1980, the military seized the control of the government for the third time of the Turkish Republic history¹⁷. It shut down all political parties and labor unions confederations, except TURK-IS which explicitly supported the coup. All union activities were put off until 1984¹⁸. However, the confederations and unions stayed closed for different durations. The ban on activities of HAK-IŞ, for example, was ended

¹⁶ The collaboration of Kristal-iş—a member of TURK-IS—and Hürcam-iş—a member of DISK—against glass industrialists was an important example (Şafak, 2013, p. 140).

¹⁷ The coup was held on the grounds of political chaos of the country and economic reasons. The rise of class and student movements in 1970s, on the one hand, led to rise of a leftist political environment in the country; on the other hand, it was considered as a threat to embrace neoliberal economic structure by the Army—and the right-wing which was supported by the US (Savran, 1987). The Parliament was shut down; the constitution was removed. For the consequences, see <http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/459038.asp>

¹⁸ Law no. 2821 (Blind, 2007, p. 295).

after a couple months of the coup, while DISK¹⁹ was closed until 1991 (Akkaya, 2002).

Besides, legal losses of unionism were heavier. Koray (1994) summarizes these as,

- Forming unions and membership: Only the people who had service contract could be a member of a trade union under the condition of informing the employer.
- Union activities: Political activities of unions were substantially limited, stating that unions could never pursue political aims; be engaged in political activities; and have relations and cooperate with political parties.
- The authority of collective bargaining: To gain the authority of collective bargaining, unions were obliged to represent 10 percent of workers in a workplace.
- Prohibition and delays of strikes: Right strikes, political strikes, general strikes and solidarity strikes were banned. The Council of Ministers was authorized with the right to delay strikes in the cases of general health and national security.

Hence, the army on power and the 1983 ANAP (the Motherland Party) government aimed to depoliticize unionism through limiting their political impact due to the threat of a class based unity, which might lead to a huge opposition to the government.

The neo-liberal economic policies, moreover, affected de-politicization of unionism and the working class. The government did not maintain the social state understanding, not following reconciliatory politics with unions. On the contrary, it reduced wages to provide cheap labor for the capitalist who tented to invest in export. So as to downsize the state, privatization was speeded up, mostly disregarding demands of unions (Akkaya, 2002). By the 1990s, due to the need for enlivening the domestic market, and rising internal pressures, the government raised wages. The increase on wages, however, led to firings in the private sector, de-unionization, flexible working forms and sub-contracting which was primarily extended in municipalities. In line with the economic policies, the anti-union propaganda campaign of the ANAP—under the leadership of Özal—“labor’s image was stained in the eyes of the public” (Blind, 2007, p. 296). Hence, spread of militancy and socialist ideology in unionism, especially in the

¹⁹ Several DISK members were prosecuted and sentenced (Blind, 2007, p. 295).

1970s, was intentionally shown as a cause of the chaos before the coup. Özal who was an ex-president of MESS created this perception through using the mistakes of unions, which attracted workers.

Although this ‘chaos’ was somewhat ‘ruled out’ by the coup and the ANAP government, it did not prevent some important demonstrations, especially the famous ‘1989 Spring Strikes’. In that era, the conflict between TURK-IS and the ANAP government was observable, as well. For the first time TURK-IS left its *axiom of Politics of above Parties*, and openly reacted to the government through the working class demonstrations and anti-ANAP campaigns before the elections (Mahiroğulları, 2005). Pressure from the below in which the working class suffered from harsh economic circumstances forced TURK-IS to protest. By the Spring Strikes, the working class with its militant and socialist sentiments made its presence felt. Due to the legal bans on strikes, “non-strike protest movements such as organizing meetings and boycotts, refusing to eat, marching barefoot, setting up roadblocks, and distributing press releases became widespread” (Blind, 2007, p. 297). A substantial amount of workers in state enterprises also participated in the strikes, which would help the foundation of unions of civil servants. The common feature of the strikes was that workers went beyond the unions, but TURK-IS embraced them.

Even if TURK-IS did not have closer relations with the ANAP government, it was criticized with being ineffective in advocating workers. In 1989, 19 unions²⁰ from TURK-IS declared that “the management of TURK-IS supports a kind of unionism that does not represent its member unions and workers, without struggling. Therefore, it has to support parliamentary democracy, and embrace the bread and democracy struggle of the working class, using the right to resistance” (Petrol-İş, 1989, p. 338-340).

Despite the existence of the opponent unions in TURK-IS, it has not shown a powerful stand against criticisms. Even if it sometimes has had conflict with the governments, it could not escape from being accused of a ‘yellow union’ (Mahiroğulları, 2005, p. 409) In the 1990s, as Blind (2007) states,

²⁰ Petrol-ış, Hava-ış, Yol-ış, Genel Maden-ış, Basın-ış, Tes-Koop-ış, Ağaç-ış, Bass, Türkiye Maden-ış, Tarım-ış, Harb-ış, Tümtis, Deri-ış, Kristal-ış, Likat-ış, TGS, Haver-ış, Belediye-ış, Basisen (Koray, 1994, p. 205).

“It has continued to experiment time and again with patron–client type dealings with the governing parties. When such endeavors have failed to give any substantial results, it has then switched to an antigovernment stand, mobilizing its rank-and-file and constituting a strong opposition bloc questioning the policies in hand, and at times, the overall legitimacy of the government”(p. 302).

During the ban on DISK, its members were obliged to join in other unions and confederations, especially TURK-IS. The numerical decline of DISK members has influenced it negatively²¹. After its re-opening in 1991, the socialist cadre of DISK has been weakened. Hence, it has lost its identity of class unionism in the 1960s and 1970s, choosing reconciliatory type of unionism which prefers cooperation with the capitalist and the government (Fuat, 2008).

3.1.2.2. *Unionism by the 2000s*

Repressive and deterrent policies of the governments have weakened the working class and unionism, beginning with the 1980s. These policies have been supported by removal of the socialist cadre of politics and unionism. Neo-liberal economic policies which have increased “informal employment, high rates of unemployment, contracted employment, insufficient job protection, privatization, part time jobs, and subcontracting” (Mahiroğulları, 2002, p.179-186) have fed de-unionization. In the 1990s, the effects of the 1980 coup have preserved its visibility in unionism; therefore, the 1990s passed in the similar way with the 1980s.

Being in power from 2002 to 2013, by the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government, however, unionization is are lower than the 1980s, through the implementations of legislation, regulations, the limited scope of collective bargaining, and their effects on political and social life (Çelik, 2012). While the Ministry of Labor declares unionization rates of 2013 as 8, 8 percent, the OECD states it as 5, 9 percent²².

²¹ In 1992, while TURK-IS had 1.766.535 members, and HAK-IS had 268.035 members, DISK had only 19.378 (Çalışma ve Sosyal Güvenlik Bakanlığı, Çalışma Hayatı İstatistikleri, No:24, Ankara 1999, s. 98; calisma. gov.tr)

²²Retrieved from: <http://www.sendika.org/2013/08/en-buyuk-sendikasizlastirma-akp-doneminde/>

Although the OECD countries have had a decline over time, Turkey has the lowest unionization rates among them²³.

A report on anti-busting techniques of the AKP government demonstrates some of them as,

- Firing unionized workers, and hiring the others to weaken unions' authority,
- Promoting the perception of unionism as a betrayal to the employer,
- Provoking workers who have different political ideologies, religious beliefs and ethnic origins to prevent organization,
- Eliminating unionism by informal economy and sub-contracting²⁴
- Forcing workers to join in pro-government unions
- Physical and psychological strikebreaking implementations
- Preparing blacklist of unionized workers and preventing them with being employed (Bakır & Akdoğan, 2009)

Undoubtedly, anti-government unions are negatively affected by these implementations. KESK (the Confederation of Public Laborer's Unions) has lost 8 per cent of members, while Memur-Sen (Civil Servant Unions' Confederation)—known as pro-government—has multiplied its members by fifteen (Çelik, 2012). Despite de-unionization processes and strengthening of yellow unionism, the 2000s has experienced important worker demonstrations and strikes. Began in 2009, the Tekel Resistance which organized against privatization²⁵, for example, has go beyond its union, Tekgıda-Iş, and been supported by many confederations, such as, TURK-IS, DISK, HAK-IS, MEMUR-SEN and KESK. A common ground has been created against privatization and anti-labor implementations of the government. Similarly, the resistance of Turkish Airlines workers was held against the ban on right to strike of

²³ OECD Stats, November 3, 2012, Retrieved from: <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=20167>.

²⁴ The total number of sub-contracted workers has nearly become one million (Cumhuriyet, 2012). Retrieved from: <http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/?hn=375338>.

²⁵ The resistance of Tekel workers were against privatization of Tekel—the national tobacco company—that was sold to the British American Tobacco. Accordingly, 12 factories were closed and approximately 12.000 workers were deployed to other public sector jobs, under a different status, the law known as '4C ' that cuts the payment up to 40 % and decreases employment rights. Retrieved from: <http://www.tekgida.org.tr/Oku/225/Tekel-Ozellestirmesinin-Sonuclari>

civil aviation workers. It lasted for 568 days under the leadership of Hava-İş (the Union of Civil Aviation Workers of Turkey) has been supported by many unions.

All in all, control and limitation of unionism in Turkey has not been able to eliminate unionism for years. In the years between 1960 and 1980, unionization gained a political identity mostly grounded on socialist ideology. Even though this ideology created some splits, unionism reached its most efficient era in terms of numerical growth of unionization and its social/political effectiveness. The militant and socialist atmosphere of unionism influenced other union members and society, shaping the political agenda. By the 1980s, sharp political discourse of unions has declined, but unions could not break away from politics, and indirectly has taken part in politics, being pro-government or opponent. Consequently, ideological divisions among the unions continue, today. It is not difficult to claim that in addition to economic circumstances, anti-political and weak unionism has weakened class consciousness of the working class by the time; however, it is debatable to argue that class perception of people along with weak unionism has fully lost its validity, ignoring the recent and ongoing strikes.

3.2. The Kurdish Question in Turkey

The Kurdish Question whose roots go back to the foundation of the Republic has gained different characteristics over time. Due to the fact that the new Republic was founded on Turkishness, the Kurdish identity could not find a place to survive despite rebellions which were strictly suppressed. By the rise of the socialist movement of the left in Turkey, the Kurdish movement created a space to be developed, firstly within the left, then independently. During its socialist period, the Kurdish movement emphasized its socialist revolutionary lines, emphasizing capitalist exploitation of Kurds, in addition to the ethnic identity awareness. By the 1980s, however, its ethnic character has become more visible in the eyes of the people of Turkey. Rising nationalism in the Kurdish movement after the mid-1990s in accordance with the changing political and economic conjuncture of the world and Turkey, led the Kurdish question to be read more from an ethnic identity-based perspective. However, evaluating the Kurdish question with class

and ethnic dynamisms is still effective today, which provides understanding the relation between class and ethnicity.

This section of the chapter will attempt to explain the evolution of the Kurdish question in accordance with the political, social and economic circumstances. Apparently, the rise of the Kurdish movement coincided with the rise of unionism in Turkey, both of them being fed by the same ideology; socialism in the 1960s; and influenced by the same political, economic and social transformations. This intersection would help to understand how the popularity of 'class' has affected both of them, giving clues about how the Kurdish question finds a place in unionism, today.

3.2.1. The Evolution of the Kurdish Question in the Early Republican Period

The foundation of the Turkish Republic as a nation-state in which minorities were determined in accordance with their non-Muslimhood by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 glorified the Turkish ethnic identity, but suppressed the others. The perception of 'people's of Turkey' which was in line with the multicultural characteristics of the Ottoman Empire was abandoned. Any identity based definition of ethnic minorities which tended to challenge Turkishness was considered as a threat to the unity of Turkey, and "all the 'now-citizens' of the Turkish Republic, including Kurds, were invited to become Turks" (Yeğen, 2004, p.127). With the definition of Turkish citizenship which has [still] an inclusive character, Kurdish identity was desired to be as invisible.

During the early period of the Republic, however, several Kurdish uprisings took place. The 1925 Sheikh Said rebellion was, for example, interpreted as a reaction to the land reform of the Republic which encroached on the power of Kurdish notables in the East Anatolia (Ergil, 2000), and as a religious reaction to the secular state formation (Brockett, 1998). These explanations or facts helped the denials of Kurdish identity; however, the Dersim Rebellion of 1937 had different characters. Firstly, in the region, there use to be local resistance to the central power before the Republic, which led some tribes to refuse to disarm and give taxes for military recruitment. Secondly, unlike the Sheikh Said Rebellion, Alevi Kurds resided in the region had no problem with secularism (Orhan, 2012). These features of the rebellion made the region favorable to the development of Kurdish nationalism. Although people were not properly organized,

and the rebellions differed in regions, it is possible to claim that the first era of the Republic had Kurdish rebellions with ethnic sentiments. These rebellions were, though, harshly suppressed by the military forces, and “state killings continued until 1939” (Orhan, 2012, p. 352), with the signal given by the state that any movement based on the Kurdish identity would be prevented. This attitude of the state designated the movement space of the Kurdish tribes’ leaders and landlords. Since this space did not include doing politics, the Kurdish landlords had to choose to cooperate with and support the Turkish state against Kurdish nationalism (Saraçoğlu, 2006).

The left in the 1920s and 1930s had various attitudes towards the Kurdish question, in relevance with the existing international leftist ideology and the national political circumstances. Yeğen (2007) claims that the left, in general, with nationalistic and reformist approach by Kemalism, viewed the Kurdish question as a non-reformist action against the Republic. For example, the TKP (the Communist Party of Turkey) which was the only sizable communist organization of the era, consisting of Turkish Marxist intellectuals considered the Sheikh Said Rebel as a battle of feudalism against the bourgeoisie. In the party weekly, the TKP stated the rebel as the common enemy of both the TKP and the bourgeoisie (Tuncay, 2000). Consequently, the Kurdish question could not gain an ethnic identity in the eyes of the left, as well; therefore, Kurds mostly associated themselves with the CHP during that period, but not as being “Kurdish” until 1961 (Oran, 2010).

3.2.2. The Left in the 1960s: the Kurdish Question as a Regional Disparity, and Ethnic Discrimination

The 1960 junta took an oppressive stand towards Kurds from the beginning of the coup. Kendal (1993) stated that one of the first implementation of the junta was to intern 485 Kurdish notables in a camp, and to expel 55 of them to the Western cities. The general amnesty did not include the 49s²⁶ who were sentenced in the DP era.

²⁶ In 1959, a DP deputy stated that the Kurds in Kirkuk were killing Turkmens, provoking retaliation for Kurds in Turkey. Kurdish intellectuals and students reacted to the statement. 50 of them were arrested. When one of them, a student, died, these people were memorialized as the 49s who would play an important role for the Kurdish movement (STMA, 1988, p.2110-2112).

Moreover, the Kurdish names of settlements were translated to Turkish. During his visits to the Kurdish cities, the leader of the junta and the president of the Republic, Cemal Gürsel, demonstrated that “there is no Kurdish nationality in this country and in the East....The origin of this country is Turkish” (Cited in Akkaya, 2013, p. 92).

Despite its discriminatory and suppressive attitude towards Kurds, the 1961 Constitution, prepared under the leadership of the junta, created a democratic and liberal atmosphere in politics. Consequently, the socialist parties and publications could create a political sphere for themselves. The magazine, *Yön* (The Way), for example, discussed ‘the Eastern Question’ by focusing on the underdevelopment and endurance of feudalism in the East, but shyly stating its ethno-cultural components (Yeğen, 2006). By the second half of 1960, however, *Yön* started to underline the ethnic, linguistic and cultural characteristics of the question. Opposing assimilation, especially, Sait Kırmızıtoprak and Doğan Avcıoğlu in *Yön* argued that the economic measures could not be sufficient to solve the question, without recognizing ethnic dimensions (Kırmızıtoprak et al, 1962; Avcıoğlu, 1966).

The foundation of the legal socialist party of Turkey, the TIP—founded by unionists who formed DISK—, moreover, provided radical changes in the political arena. Founded by twelve unionists, especially by the election of M. A. Aybar as the chairman, the TIP gained a very important and determining role in the left of Turkey (Samim, 1981). The Kurdish group in the TIP, called as the Easterners²⁷, had an effective representation in the top ranks, which had strong influence for the Kurdish question to be discussed both in the TIP and the left in general. Identifying the Eastern question as a primary concern of the party, in its first congress of 1964, it was stated

“In parallel with the economic backwardness of the region, citizens here are socially and culturally backward. Moreover, the citizens who speak Kurdish and Arabic, as well as those belonging to the Alevi sect, are exposed to discrimination [...]. These citizens [...] have not been afforded the comforts of citizenship that they have earned. [...] TIP will treat these groups as full citizens”(Bozbeyli, 1970, p.324-325).

²⁷ Some important names of this group were Kemal Burkay, Mehdi Zana, Naci Kutlay, Tarık Ziya Ekinci and Canip Yıldırım.

In the 4th Congress of the TIP in 1970, substantially clear steps were taken towards the Kurdish question which was defined by economic, social and cultural terms. In this congress, the existence of Kurdish people in the East and Southeast parts of Turkey was accepted. The reason behind the economic backwardness of the region was explained as the discriminative economic and social policies of the dominant classes, in addition to the law of unequal development of capitalism. Therefore, it was stated that to consider the Kurdish question as a mere regional development problem was a chauvinist-nationalist view of the dominant classes. In order to struggle for the rights of Kurdish citizens, it was announced that Kurdish and Turkish socialists should have worked together in direction with the struggle of socialist revolution of the working class²⁸. Due to these statements, the TIP was closed by the Supreme Court in 1971. However, the identification of the Kurdish question as not only a problem of backwardness but also an ethnic and national problem opened a new way for the discussion of the question by the left as a whole; but it also caused some splits in the TIP and the left.

3.2.2.1. The Independent Socialist Kurdish Movement in the 1960s

The social and political transformations that led left-wing ideologies to be raised among intellectuals and students, called as the 68 generation, Kurds in Turkey could be able to form their own organizations separate from or within the left of Turkey. Through reading translated publications on socialism, “they perceived the ‘misfortune’ of the Kurds as not unique to the Kurdish people but as a systemic outcome of Turkish imperialism in the region” (Gündoğan, 2011, p.391). Consequently, the Kurdish movement in that era was developed in two streams; the nationalist Kurds, inspired by the Barzani revolts in Iraq, who formed the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey (TKPD) in 1965; and the socialist Kurds who formed the Revolutionary Cultural Hearths of the East (DDKO) in 1969 (Gündoğan, 2011). The first Kurdish nationalist party, the TKPD was mostly composed of the Kurdish elite who supported self-determination program, aiming to support the Barzani movement (Akkaya, 2013). However, the transition of the Kurdish movement from the dominance of the elite to mass mobility provided Kurdish population with being more active with politics

²⁸ The full text of the congress is available on <http://behiceboran.org/>

(Bozarslan, 2008). The determinant momentum of this transition was the Eastern Meetings, even if they were not organized by merely independent Kurdish organizations. In the years between 1967 and 1969, twelve meetings took place with the participation of 10 thousand Kurds (Elçik, 2007). Discussion among the intellectuals and university students about cultural and political pressure, regional disparities, and neglect of the East found a wide place among ordinary people. The slogans of the meetings, such as “We stand together with all those who fight against Fascism and imperialism”, “Respect for our language”, and “The destiny of the east is hunger, unemployment and disdain” (Cited in Gündoğan, 2011, p. 414) underlined the mobilization of the left of Turkey—under the leadership of the TIP—and Kurdish people, defining the Kurdish question from an economic, political and cultural perspective.

The second stream of the Kurdish movement, the DDKO was founded through the momentum brought by the Eastern Meetings. By being the first legal Kurdish organization, it firstly made the question as ‘Kurdish’, rather than ‘Eastern’, inspiring many of the future Kurdish organizations (Bucak, 1986). The foundation of the DDKO was a separation point from the left of Turkey and the Kurdish movement in Iraq. It went beyond being an elite organization by mobilizing different segments of the society and the Kurdish youth. The DDKO with its socialist tendency, unlike the TKPD, became a source for the Kurdish socialist line through separating from the left in Turkey (Akkaya, 2013). Hence, the process of gaining autonomy of the Kurdish movement coincided with the dominance of the socialist ideology on the Kurdish activists. As Bozarslan (2008) points out “even if it did not leave classical nationalist themes, the Kurdish movement in Turkey gained a post-nationalist character, perceiving itself as a part of peasant-worker movement and people who fought against imperialism” (p. 855).

3.2.3. The 1970s: Is Kurdistan a Colony, or not?

The 1971 coup intimidated both the socialist and Kurdish movements. The cadres of the socialist and Kurdish organizations were exiled or arrested. However, the leftist and Kurdish movements gained momentum by the 1970s. Unlike in the 1960s, though, after the General Amnesty of 1974, Turkish and Kurdish socialists began to

organize separately. This separation was grounded on the thesis that ‘Kurdistan is a colony’.

With regards to the Kurdish movement, the thesis of the ‘Kurdistan is a colony’ was put forward by Sait Kırmızıtoprak (Dr. Şivan) who was a writer of *Yön*. The development of the thesis on the Marxist base was carried out by Kemal Burkay, as early as 1973 (Akkaya, 2013). By the mid-1970s, all Kurdish organizations²⁹ took the thesis that ‘Kurdistan is a colony’ as a base for their struggle. In its discussions, the magazine, *Özgürlük Yolu* (1977), founded by Kemal Burkay, suggested “the working class, and other proletarian rank and file in terms of their own interests embraced and shaped the national problem” (p.18). Similarly, *Rızgarî* (1977) stated “the national problem of today was not only a problem of getting rid of the national pressure, but also a movement of getting rid of imperialism, colonialism and exploitation (p. 11). These statements of the Kurdish front intersected the working class exploitation with the ethnic/cultural oppression of Kurds. Although the other socialist organizations of Turkey made a similar connection between the two, defining the Kurdish question in terms of colonization caused disagreements with the autonomous Kurdish movement.

The disagreement was based on the argument by almost every Turkish leftist organization³⁰ was that while Turkey was a semi/new colony, it could not be a colonizer (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2013). The magazine, *Ürün*, published by the TKP, for example, blamed this thesis of being a weapon that was used by the separatist bourgeoisie to damage the proletarian unity of different nations (in *Özgürlük Yolu*, 1977). Since the TKP did not clearly separate the Kurdish question from the socialist struggle, it believed that the proletarian dominance in a socialist system would solve the national questions, by itself. The similar discussion regarding the colony thesis, *Devrimci Yol* (Dev-Yol) which was the most aggregate leftist organization of the era, demonstrated that the stratification in Turkey was defined in terms of classes, not nationalities; hence, all oppressed classes in the country should struggle against the dominant classes, regardless

²⁹ Akkaya (2013) categorizes these groups in three; the traditional Kurdish nationalists, the TKPD-KUK with the TKPD origin; the representatives of autonomous Kurdish movements, Rızgari, Kawa, and the DDKD-KIP with DDKO origin; and sourced by the socialist movement, the PSK, Têkoşin, and the PKK (p.102).

³⁰ *Kurtuluş* was the only Turkish leftist organization which accepted the thesis of ‘Kurdistan is a colony’ (Yeğen, 2007).

of their nationalities (*Dev-Yol*, 1977a, 1977b). *Dev-Yol* (1978a) defined the relationship between Kurds and Turks as the relationship between the oppressed and oppressor; however, since Turkey was dependent to imperialism, it could not have colonial relations. Indeed, except the discussions about colonization of Kurdistan, the majority of the left approved the national nature of the Kurdish question. Moreover, they recognized the right to self-determination of the Kurdish nation, in line with the Leninist ideology (Yeğen, 2007). Although they embraced similar ideologies on socialism and the Kurdish question, the idea of the Kurdish movement's being independent from the socialist movement in line with the thesis of the 'Kurdistan is a colony' caused the left going to different directions.

3.2.3.1. *The PKK: Socialist, Independent and Kurdish Armed Struggle*

None of the Kurdish organizations in the 1970s rejected armed struggle, theoretically; however, most of them was in favor of initial ideological political awakening and organization, except the PKK (the Workers' Party of Kurdistan). Being involved in the Kurdish organizations which were inspired by the socialist movement of Turkey³¹, the PKK was organized militarily, beginning in 1977 under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan. After the foundation of the party in 1978, its charter called for a Marxist revolution (Philips, 2008), with hammer and sickle signs on its flag. Developing around Öcalan's charismatic leadership, the PKK succeeded to put its theory into practice, through not being affected by the negative developments in the South Kurdistan; creating its own discourse apart from the socialist countries'; and raising professional militant cadres, forming an illegal organization (Akkaya, 2013). The success of the PKK in its early years was also explained by the fact that it could use the existing conflicts between the landlords and peasants through fighting against landlords, which helped it to gain the support of the peasants (Romano, 2006). In addition to the Marxist line, it was observable that the PKK's mass mobilization was also fed by Kurdish nationalism, especially after 1980s, in accordance with political and economic changes across the world, as Romano (2006) underlines "[w]hat seems to differentiate the PKK from its local competitors is a strategy which would appeal to

³¹ A founder of the THKP-C, Mahir Çayan supported 'the Politicized Armed Strategy' which inspired the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan (Akkaya, 2013).

people who initially cared little for its Marxist–Leninist ideology or a politicized Kurdish ethnic nationalism” (Cited in Güneş, 2012, p. 249).

3.2.4. The 1980s and Afterwards

The military regime in Turkey between the years of 1980 and 1983 aimed to crush the Kurdish movement, as well as the left and the trade unions. Almost every Kurdish political activist was arrested and tortured in prisons (Güneş, 2012). The denial of the Kurdish identity continued. In the late 1980s, several southeastern provinces were put under the martial law, in addition to the declaration of state of emergency (Philips, 2008). The broad definition of terrorism in the 1980 Constitution supported criminalization of politically active Kurds and any discussion about the Kurdish question. In addition to the armed struggle between the PKK and the Turkish army, the government maintained political assassination through government-backed deaths of ‘suspected Kurds’ (Kinzer, 2006). In the years between 1989 and 1996, deaths of more than 1500 people remained unsolved³². These policies and implementations were fed by social policies, as well. In the years between 1984 and 1999, about 3700 Kurdish villages³³ were evacuated and, around 1-3 million villagers were displaced.

All these acts have led a social transformation to take place in Turkey, which put Kurds in a disadvantaged place, politically, socially and economically. While the Kurdish movement with the PKK had a socialist core in its first years, by the mid-1990s, the Kurdish movement over the years has become to be known more of an ethnic nationalist movement. The thesis that Kurdistan is a colony, however, is also discussed, today.

3.2.4.1. *The Kurdish Question as an Ethnic Problem*

By weakening of the socialist left in Turkey in the 1980s, the organic tie between the PKK and the left was almost severed; however, the PKK preserved its Marxist discourse in the 1990s. At the same time, the PKK grounded its primary politics on the

³² Turkish Human Rights Association, Annual Report 2004.

³³ IHD, <http://www.ihd.org.tr/index.php/makaleler-mainmenu-125/2484-zorla-yerinden-etme-uygulamasi.html>

project of an independent Kurdistan³⁴, unlike the Kurdish movement before the 1980s, since it tried to articulate nationalism with Marxism (Saraçoğlu, 2006). After the collapse of the real socialism in the world, the ideology of the PKK has transformed in line with the liberal and conservative directions of the world. Saraçoğlu (2006) explains this transformation, grounding on weakening of the socialist based worker movement by the 1980s, which led the Kurdish poor in cities to sever its ties with socialism and the worker movement. Accordingly, “the PKK, by the mid-1990s, endeavored to clean out socialist units in the Kurdish movement” (Saraçoğlu, 2006, p.249). There have been several reasons that paved the way for this situation.

On the one hand, the domestic changes by the 1980 coup which annihilated the left, and neo-liberal economic policies that increased social and economic inequalities from which Kurds were mostly affected can be considered as the internal factors of the transformation of the Kurdish question with the PKK. The denial of the Kurdish identity by the Turkish state which has reduced the issue to economic backwardness or the paranoia of foreign forces has fed this transformation as well. The Kurdish movement, for example, was not even considered as ‘Kurdish’ before the 1980s (Çelik, 2010), ignoring its ethnic character but underlining different scenarios, as Ergin (2012) points out,

“ [...] diverse roots [were sought] behind the Kurdish issue: a bunch of bandits; a changing constellation of international actors, such as the USA, the EU, Turkey’s Arab neighbors or communists, provoking the Kurdish issue; or poverty and lack of education causing underdevelopment. Uniting this eclectic collection was a denial of Kurdish identity” (Ergin, 2012, p.6)

The chronic denial of Kurdishness, therefore, might have called for a necessity of emphasizing the Kurdish ethnicity by the Kurdish movement.

On the other hand, international developments have influenced the nature of the Kurdish movement. Firstly, the end of the Gulf War created a ‘safe heaven’ for Kurds in Iraq (Yeğen, 2006, p.135), which enhanced relations between the Iraqi Kurds and the PKK. These relations also made the PKK come closer to the ideology of the Kurdish movement in Iraq which put an emphasis on nationalism more clearly than socialism (Saraçoğlu, 2006). Secondly, the popularizations of human rights and identity politics,

³⁴ In 1995, the 5th congress of the PKK called for a ‘democratic and united Kurdistan’ (Serxwebûn, January 1995)

and the process of the European Union (EU) accession of Turkey have opened a way for Kurds to be heard in the international arena. Rising the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on human rights or ethnic identities have helped Kurds to sue the state for their violated social, political and cultural rights. For example, Çelik (2005, p.986) claims that “in late 1990s, the vocabulary of the European Court entered into the lives of those who believed that their rights are violated”, by NGOs or individual applications. Regarding Turkey’s candidacy of the EU, Turkey has been exposed to deal with human right violations and the cultural rights of Kurds (Çelik, 2005). The emphasis on the cultural rights has also emphasized the ethnic nature of the Kurdish problem. To sum up, Sakallıoğlu (1998, p.73) states “the rise of Kurdish nationalism in the 1990s has to do with such international and domestic developments as the 1991 Gulf War, and the growing strength of ideas concerning identity, difference, cultural and human rights”.

The discourse of the latest pro-Kurdish party, the BDP (the Peace and Democracy Party) in Turkey is in this direction, underlining cultural rights of Kurds in a democratic autonomous system of governance. The party bylaw defines the BDP as, “libertarian, egalitarian, just, peaceable, pluralist, participatory, opposing all kinds of discrimination, human and society focused,..., adopting democratic local-horizontal governance,..., the left-wing mass party” (the BDP bylaw, Art. 2). Although the BDP defines itself as leftist, it avoids from having a radical left discourse, not using the concepts of labor, exploitation, or socialism in its bylaw, unlike the Kurdish movement before the mid-1990s. Rather, it declares that it supports

“a political and social structure which provides exercising individual, collective, political, economic, social and cultural rights and freedoms, effectively; and it struggles for education in mother tongue for everyone, and settlement for the democratic understanding in the fields of the media, thought, and art and culture” (the BDP bylaw, Art. 3 (e)).

Accordingly, today’s Kurdish Movement is mostly interpreted as having an ideological change, diverging from its proletarian revolutionary line. Yükselen (2013), for example, argues that even if the Kurdish Movement has sustained its existence with the rural and urban poor and labor, it cooperated with the Kurdish bourgeoisie at the political level. Although it has helped the movement to be heard and discussed politically, it also has damaged its class dimension. Yükselen (2013) suggests that it has been forgotten that

the abbreviation of the PKK stands for the Workers' Party of Kurdistan while the movement has developed in the national sense, but blurring in the socio-class sense. Thus, As Benlisoy (2012) demonstrates that as every movement with national characteristic, the political themes of today's Kurdish movement is more concerned with democracy, political rights and self-governance, without politicization of Kurdishness with class concepts.

3.2.4.2. *The Kurdish Question as a class and ethnic based problem*

The Kurdish question which has been mostly defined from two separate perspectives; merely ethnic based, or merely class based might lead to disregard the dynamics between class and ethnicity. Indeed, the national questions are generally not merely based on ethnic identities or cultural rights, but these identities contain economic suppressed/suppressor relations, and intertwine with class based suppression (Benlisoy, 2012). Çiçek (2012) also points out “in the context of the Kurdish question, it is impossible to understand class relations refrained from ethnicity; nor can one understand ethnicity in separation from class relations” (p.11). Class and ethnicity interaction-based explanation of the Kurdish question which İsmail Beşikçi was one of the pioneers of its theorization is also being discussed, today. This view criticizes the Marxist ideology of being insufficient to explain colonization processes that are influenced by ethnic dimensions, in addition to class (Loomba, 2000,; Fanon, 1963,; Şeriatî, 2009). Loomba (2000), for example, argues that on the one hand, colonial regimes relate class relations with ethnic and cultural differences in the international level; on the other hand, they articulate ethnic and cultural differences in the domestic level with the class relations. Similarly, Fanon (1963) also states “in the colonies, economy is both base and superstructure. You may be rich, because you are white, and since you are rich, you are white” (p.40). Adopting the thesis that Kurdistan as a colony, this perspective underlines the dynamics between cultural assimilation of Kurds which have served for the development of the capitalism and socioeconomic inequalities which deliberately created for Kurds. Hence, Beşikçi (1992) argues that “ethnic and socio-economic aspects of the East problem are in total” (p.675). According to him, although the Turkish state reduced the problem to merely economic backwardness, it has aimed to prevent the Kurdish region from being capitalized through cooperating

with the feudal system that has been kept away from Kurdish nationalism. Hence, it is not surprising that almost whole parts of the Kurdish region were determined as the poorest region of Turkey by a report by the Ministry of Economics in 2012³⁵. Moreover, by the internal displacement policy, Kurds in metropolis have become the cheapest labors in the informal employment (Kaygalak, 2001; Yörük, 2009), creating the lowest layer in the working class in terms of wages and working standards.

Çiçek (2012) acknowledges that the Kurdish middle class politics tend to reduce the Kurdish question to an ethnic identity problem, especially in the years between 1999 and 2005. The reasons behind that are explained by Çiçek (2012) as the dominance of liberal civil society organizations, the rise of the AKP's and the BDP's middle class in the region, and the dominance of the middle class in the legal Kurdish movement. It is interpreted that the new Kurdish middle class tends to focus more on the recognition of Kurdish identity in law with a reconciliatory and moderate way rather than a confrontational and bitter way (Benlisoy, 2012). This explanation of the Kurdish question is in line with the first era of the independent Kurdish movement which was fed by socialism. Accordingly, Gündoğan (2011) evaluates today's Kurdish movement by stating that "following their predecessors, today Kurdish activists question not merely this reified national territory but also the repercussions of current market-oriented policies as well as other suppressive practices and ideologies embedded in that territory" (p. 416).

Whether does today's Kurdish movement as a whole embrace this understanding or not, the Turkish state's approach to the Kurdish question is in line with the transformed nature of the Kurdish movement. In contrary with the former policies of the Turkish state, the most recent developments regarding the Kurdish question are interpreted as the efforts for capitalization of the Kurdish region to integrate Kurds in the capitalist system (Küçük, 2013;, Üstündağ, 2013). The AKP government's Kurdish

³⁵ The Ministry of Economics, 6 April 2012, Retrieved from: http://www.ekonomi.gov.tr/upload/459D1E1B-AD17-FF9A-A40AC03569331A85/6_Nisan_Sunum_son.pdf.

initiative in 2009 and the democratization package of 2013³⁶ in the peace process by the PKK's disarmament also tended to respond to these cultural and political demands of Kurds. Some of these measurements are, in 2009, changing names of towns and cities back to their original Kurdish names; lifting a ban on private television channels broadcasting in Kurdish³⁷; and in 2013, the right to education in mother tongue in private schools; allowing for political propaganda in non-Turkish languages and dialects. Concerning the democratization package of the AKP which provides education in mother tongue in private schools, Küçük (2013) for example, suggests that it supposedly responds the demand of equality of Kurds through privatization and commoditization of the right to education in mother tongue. Consequently, it creates a division between Kurds as the ones who are eligible to use their right to education in Kurdish, and those who are unworthy to enjoy this right: the poor. Moreover, this neoliberal logic asserts itself in the meeting of Turkish Prime Minister, Erdoğan and the President of the Governing Council of Iraq, Barzani in Diyarbakır³⁸. Aiming to establish new alliances for security or new trade agreements on oil and gas, the AKP seeks to create a new middle class of Kurds who feel less discriminated by being eligible to benefit from both the capitalist system and cultural rights (Üstündağ, 2013), leading to individual integration of Kurds. Consequently, the AKP's new attitude towards the Kurdish question can be interpreted as new ways of creating a new middle class of Kurds who enjoy cultural rights through provided economic opportunities, and integrating the Kurdish poor who has been dispossessed, criminalized, and

³⁶By the negotiations between the government and the PKK, the PKK decided on disarmament to be integrated to the political system. To respond the ceasefire with constitutional and legal reforms, on September 30, 2013, a democratization package was introduced by the AKP government. The demands of the Kurdish front were mostly related with political autonomy of the region, abolition of 10 percent electoral threshold, and cultural rights of Kurds. The government responded these demands by only providing the right to education in mother tongue in private schools, and allowing for political propaganda in different languages and dialects (Alptekin & Tafolar, 2013).

³⁷ Kurdistan Commentary, 15 November 2009
<http://kurdistancommentary.wordpress.com/2009/11/15/akps-kurdish-initiative/>

³⁸ The Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan met Barzani in Diyarbakır on November 16, 2013, in order to accelerate the peace process. For the first time, Erdoğan called the Kurdish region as 'Kurdistan', and exiled Kurdish artist Şivan Perwer came to the meeting. Retrieved from: http://www.zaman.com.tr/dunya_erdogan-barzani-bulusmasinda-sivan-perwer-surprizi_2166344.html

subcontracted in metropolis into the system without the provision of rights. By doing so, the Kurdish middle class can be tamed and stop supporting the Kurdish movement whose base consists of the poor and the labor. Hence, this approach might lead the Kurdish movement to weaken its ties with the working class, and the Kurdish question to be considered as a mere identity based problem.

In addition, ideological divisions in the left, as it is touched on in the first section, have sustained ignorance of the class dimension of the Kurdish question. Benlisoy (2012) argues that substantial segment of the left—including the trade unions—defines the fight against neo-liberalism through using a patriotic and anti-imperialist discourse. This approach in the left paves a way for a nationalistic and discriminative attitude towards the Kurdish question, which defines the causes of the question grounding on ‘imperialist forces’. Moreover, the trade unions’ protests against privatization, which are based on the slogan of ‘*vatan satulamaz*³⁹’, promote a nationalistic discourse, alienating Kurds from the left of Turkey and the trade unions. In addition to ideological alienation, in the first place, Kurds rarely find a place in unionism due to working in the informal economic sector without social security (Benlisoy, 2012). Consequently, the separation between the Kurdish movement and the left has been clinched, today, leading to mostly disregard the discussion of the Kurdish question grounding on the two dimensions; class and ethnicity. Thus, a perspective which discusses class and ethnic based nature of the Kurdish question brings a new outlook for the question itself and the capitalist system in which class as a determining variable that is disregarded.

All in all, while rise of unionism coincides with the rise of the Kurdish movement in Turkey in the 1960s-70s, they have mostly become detached, today. The political conjuncture of Turkey and the world in the 1960s and the 1970s provided both of them with showing their powerful existence in the political arena. The socialist line of unionism and the left of Turkey helped the Kurdish question to be heard more publicly, while the Kurdish movement began to appear in the political scene. However, by the mid-1970s, ideological divisions in the left and the Kurdish movement itself caused

³⁹ It refers to a patriotic slogan, meaning ‘the land cannot be solved’. This statement is mostly used against privatization of public properties which is considered as treason when they are sold to the foreign capital. As an example, see <http://sozcu.com.tr/2013/gunun-icinden/ozellestirmeye-karsi-cadirli-nobet-182380/>

separations between them. While some segments of the left and unionism began to insist on the Marxist approach on class which prioritizes class dimension, directly or indirectly leading to suppression of other identities, the Kurdish Movement moved towards an approach that defined the question in terms of multiple dimensions; class and ethnicity. Over time, this separation has increased. By the 1980s, attacks to the left have decreased its momentum substantially whereas the Kurdish Movement's emphasis on the Kurdish ethnic identity has become more visible. Removal of the socialist cadre of the unions and limitations on unionization by neoliberal policies of the governments has led unionism to be weakened and de-politicized. Through de-politicization of unionism—in addition to weakening of the left—the unions ideologically have become distant from being interested in the Kurdish question which is more commonly interpreted from an ethnic based perspective. It will be analyzed how all these reflect on the interpretation of the Kurdish question by the unions.

CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

4.1. The Scope of the Research

This study is an example of qualitative and exploratory research. Exploratory research aims “(1) to scope out the magnitude or extent of a particular phenomenon, problem, or behavior, (2) to generate some initial ideas about that phenomenon, or (3) to test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study regarding that phenomenon” (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p.6) through conducting generally secondary data, in-depth interviews or case studies. This study is also categorized as an explanatory research which seeks to answer the question of “*How do trade union members—as class based organizations—interpret the Kurdish question in Turkey?*”, aiming to understand the relationship between class and ethnic identities. Unlike an explanatory research, since exploratory research does not conduct extensive statistics, it does not tend to generalize the findings to population, but works on relatively small groups. Hence, this study seeks to analyze specifically two trade unions of Turkey; namely Petrol-İş and Hava-İş, through using secondary data and structured interviews with union managers and worker members in order to find out whether their definition of the working class intersects with their perception of the Kurdish question. This study hopes to shed a new light on both the discussion of class whose popularity is replaced by identity politics, and the Kurdish question which has more popularly been studied from an ethnic identity-based perspective through exploring the dynamics between each other. Although these dynamics have been discussed in the literature, this study hopes to be a valuable example of research on the Kurdish question which will be asked in trade unions—as class based organizations.

4.2. The Research Approach

4.2.1. Methodology of Data Collection

In line with qualitative and exploratory research, the study conducted structured interviews, using them as the fundamental data, and collected secondary data. Firstly, structured interviews seek to yield insights into a phenomenon, tapping the interpretations of those relevant to the problem. They help to compare and contrast

participant responses to answer the research question. However, the researcher sometimes has to lead participants without affecting the nature of the responses in order to get the answer of the question. In this study, all open-ended but different interview questions⁴⁰ were prepared for the union managers and workers; however, their content was the same. While the managers were asked to answer the questions in accordance with the general stance of the trade union, workers were expected to share their personal experiences and opinions within the context. Secondly, secondary data are the data which has been collected and assorted by other sources (Bhattacharjee, 2012). These kinds of data include newspaper clippings, publications of trade unions, minutes of general meetings of the trade unions and data collected by other researches. The disadvantages of secondary data analysis are the possible false newspaper reports or unrepresentative-ness of publications. However, it is useful in reaching systematic information easily.

The interview questions for both managers and workers composed of three basic parts; general questions related to the union, questions on class (specifically the working class), and questions on the Kurdish question. For the managers, the first part included general questions about the particular trade union, investigating the foundation purpose of the union, its activities on different cities, membership criterion, and the profile of the members and factors that communized them. This part aimed to find out the mission of the trade unions, their stance against the government or employee, and views on transformation of unionism in Turkey. Similarly, for workers, it was investigated in the first part of the interview why they were affiliated with the union, how much they were active, and how they were benefitted from unionization. The second part included questions that sought to learn the working class definitions/characters of the unions and its members whether they considered themselves as a member of the working class, the perception of class identity, and their views on 'other' organizations based on identities. The first and second parts of the interview also questioned the historical changes of unionism and the concept of the working class, and their reasons in order to measure how they were familiar with these changes and the results. Finally, the third part focused on the Kurdish question to investigate how they defined the Kurdish question in terms of its cultural, economic and political aspects, and whether they found the

⁴⁰ See Appendix A for the list of the questions.

Kurdish question as an obstacle for the unionist movement. Particularly for the managers, in this part, it was asked whether they had activities related to the Kurdish question. To the workers, it was asked whether they felt dissociation between Turks and Kurds in their workplaces. In order to understand workers' opinions on Kurds' everyday life practices, their views and experiences of speaking or listening to music in Kurdish were questioned. The main aim of the interview, on the one hand, was to learn *whether the members of the trade unions can relate the oppression of the working class to the oppression of Kurds if they define the working class on the basis of its suppression, considering themselves as its members.*

From each union, one manager participated in the research. I interviewed with eight members of Petrol-İş and eleven members of Hava-İş. One to one interviews managers were conducted in the central offices of the unions while workers were interviewed in their working places. All participants were informed about the research and their consent on tape-recording of the interviews was received⁴¹. To interview the managers, I personally took appointments from them. Interviews with the managers lasted for more than one hour. I asked them to guide me to their members. Petrol-İş arranged *Bayer Chemistry and Medicine Factory in Topkapı, Istanbul* which is a German company, introducing me with the union representative. In order to wait for workers' shift, I spent four workdays at the working place. In addition to the interviews, I also had a chance to chat with workers in the union room for hours. I was informed by the union representative at Bayer about the ethnic identities of the participants before the interview. Three workers from Bayer were Kurdish. All participants have been working under the same status at Bayer, being blue-collar workers, despite having different levels of education. In the case of Hava-İş, I was guided to interview the resisters in the Turkish Airlines Strike, since I was informed that workers who did not participate in the resistance would hesitate from interviewing due to the pressure of the employee. Therefore, I spent two days in the field of strike, at the Atatürk Airport in Yeşilköy, with interviewing flight attendants, technicians, and ground attendants who had different levels of socio-economic status (white or blue collar workers) and ethnic identities. However, in order to avoid biased answers, I personally contacted three non-

⁴¹ See Appendix B for the consent form.

strikers from Hava-Iş, and interviewed them.⁴² The process of finding non-strikers was hard for me, since some of them suggested that they really were afraid to be blacklisted by the employer.

4.2.2. Sampling

In order to answer the research question, I chose two trade unions from the Confederation, TURK-IS; Petrol-Iş and Hava-Iş. As it was analyzed in the third chapter, TURK-IS, for its foundation, has not hesitated from cooperating with the governments, as Blind (2007, p.302) points out “it has continued to experiment time and again with patron–client type dealings with the governing parties”. Hence, it was usually debatable whether this cooperation was in favor of the working class. As a recent example, in the Tekel Strike, Tekel workers resisted against privatization of the company, supported by many trade unions and public, Tekgıda-Iş (a member union of TURK-IS) hesitated from reacting against the AKP government; therefore, as Özüğurlu (2011, p.182) points out in his ethnographic work, " [...] right-wing section of union bureaucracies especially made considerable effort to nullify each planned action and consequently we witnessed the unusual public revolt of workers against the union bureaucracy". As in the case of the Tekel Strike, TURK-IS could not escape from being accused of a yellow union. Consequently, the monitory declaration of 19 member unions—including Petrol-Iş and Hava-Iş—signaled the disagreements based on defense of the worker rights, in the Confederation, and they formed the Platform of Union of Forces (*Sendikal Güçbirliği Platformu*, SGBP) in collaboration with other trade unions from different confederations. This platform in its manifesto states

- “We support class solidarity against neo-liberalism, defining the working class without discriminating employed-unemployed, unionized-non-unionized or white-blue collars, calling for a pluralist, just, democratic, secular and social state,
- In order to strengthen unionization, our primary agenda is amendment of the constitution on the basis of guaranteeing fundamental rights and freedoms. We demand a social and democratic constitution which is prepared through a

⁴² See Appendix C for the personal information of all participants.

democratic—without an election threshold—process in which all democracy forces participate,

- We support independent and democratic Turkey in which identities are not excluded and discriminated, nature is not commodified, and gender segregation is ended. We consider it necessary to cooperate with organizations which support these demands,
- Today, it is impossible for unionism to be distant from politics. We support unionism which is not directed by political parties and governments, but intervenes in politics” (SGBP Manifesto, n.d)⁴³.

The opponent formation in TURK-IS, on the one hand, challenges its worker representativeness; on the other hand, it signals the effort for class and mass unionism. It takes a stand concerning some problems of the country—democratization, gender segregation, identity based discrimination—in addition to the working class problems. The SGBP does not hesitate to indicate its roles in politics, as opposed to *the axiom of Politics of above Parties* of TURK-IS. It also defines the working class in accordance with the Marxist definition. Regarding Petrol-İş and Hava-İş as falling under the category of class and mass unionism, I aimed to explore how similar ideologies of unionism/class reflect on the interpretation of the Kurdish question.

4.2.2.1. *Petrol-İş as a case*

Petrol-İş was founded in 1950 by 23 petrol workers who were working in the international petrol companies⁴⁴. As the manager of the union states, it has approximately 27 thousand members, today. Member workers are defined by the manager as having higher economic levels in comparison to the standards of Turkey due to the union conditions and the petrol sector which has high profit margins. Majority of the members are blue-collar workers who work with physical labor. Two thousand of its members are women. Everyone who works in the sector—petrol, chemistry, rubber—can be a member of Petrol-İş; however, their involvement in the collective bargaining is determined by law. It has sixteen branches in Turkey; Adana, Adıyaman, Ankara,

⁴³ The publication date of the manifesto is not notified. Retrieved from http://www.sendikalgucbirliigi.org/?page_id=9

⁴⁴ Petrol-İş Retrieved from <http://petrol-is.org.tr/sayfa/tarihce-3212>

Aliağa, Bandırma, Batman, Bursa, Düzce, Gebze, İstanbul 1-2, İzmir, Kırıkkale, Kocaeli, Mersin, Trakya.

In terms of its class and unionism understanding, Petrol-İş has been considered as the leading one among the opponent formation in TURK-IS, as Blind (2007) states,

“Petrol-İş, has linked its professional activism to its collaboration with intellectuals and active use research, to its inner democratic workings, and finally, to the pressure of privatizations and the indispensable need to adapt to changing economic conditions. They have done this by generating creative multimedia tools, such as brochures, posters, and ads in newspapers, radio, and television” (p. 303).

In its magazines and website, class and mass unionization (as opposed to yellow unions) is emphasized⁴⁵. Most of the interviewers from Petrol-İş agreed on the idea that it was one of the best trade unions in Turkey in terms of struggling on behalf of the working class and democratic elections of unionists, although they criticized some features of it.

In addition to class understanding of Petrol-İş, it often expresses opinion on the Kurdish question by its managers and in their publications. The chairman of Petrol-İş in the years between 1987 and 1994, Münir Ceylan, for example, was sentenced to 20 months imprisonment due to criticizing the Anti-Terror Law⁴⁶ (Petrol-İş, 1993) through defining deaths, torture and exploitation in the Kurdish regions as ‘state terror’. Moreover, Petrol-İş is significant in terms of representation of Kurdish workers in the Kurdish region of Turkey, Adana, Adıyaman and Batman. Being a BDP partisan⁴⁷, the chairman of the Batman branch, Mustafa Mesut Tekik, for example, blamed TURK-IS of being uninterested in the Kurdish question declaring in a meeting of the SGBP in Diyarbakır that “we want TURK-IS to be able to explain that the Kurdish question is a

⁴⁵ As an example, see <http://petrol-is.org.tr/haber/sinif-ve-kitle-sendikaciligi-anlayisi-yeniden-tesis-edilmelidir-3202>.

⁴⁶ The Anti-Terror Law of 1991 determined ‘terror’ in a very rigid sense, broadening its definition which substantially limited freedom of thought and the right to organize. It has led many people and organizations to be put on trial or sentenced. Children under 18 years old have also been affected by this law. Retrieved from: <http://www.taraf.com.tr/haber/terorle-mucadele-kanunu-ve-cocuklar.htm>.

⁴⁷ Batman Doğuş, 10 September 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.batmandogusgazetesi.com/haber-28294-Tekik-ile-dobra-dobra.html>.

question of whole Turkey and all workers” (Petrol-İş, 2011). In direction with these circumstances, Petrol-İş can be considered as a sensitive trade union which demands a peaceful, egalitarian and democratic solution of the Kurdish question.

4.2.2.2. *Hava-İş as a case*

Hava-İş was founded in 1962 to unionize flight and ground attendants, workers in agricultural spraying, and workers in aircraft maintenance and repair departments. It has approximately 16 thousand members with five branches; Izmir, Ankara, Antalya, Adana and Istanbul. The manager defines its member profile as ‘not classical proletarian type’ due to the service sector in which both white and blue collar workers work (59, Istanbul, 03.10.2013). The number of women and men members is equal. The manager indicates that Hava-İş organized at every place the Turkish Airlines flights to. The Turkish Airlines Incorporation is the biggest company in which Hava-İş is organized. From 1964 onwards, Hava-İş has been forming collective labor agreements with the administration of the Turkish Airlines Inc. (Çelik, 2013). Being the national airline company of Turkey, the Turkish Airlines has been very significant for the Turkish state, causing the governments being influential in its administration. This influence of the governments has often led to disagreements between the administration and Hava-İş.

Throughout its history, Hava-İş, has decided to go on a strike for several times due to the clashes with the administration and the governments. The last strike took place in the 15th May 2013; however the roots of the conflict went back to May 2012. During the tense collective bargaining process of 2012, a law which banned the right to strike of workers who worked in the aviation line was passed on May 29, 2012 by the Parliament at the request of an AKP deputy, Metin Külünk, who had close relations with the Turkish Airlines administration (Çelik, 2013). On the same day, workers from Hava-İş protested this law by not going to work for a couple hours, through participating in the press release. As a result of this protest, 305 workers were fired. From this date on, Hava-İş continued its resistance, taking support of other unions, including Petrol-İş, and some organizations. On October 19, 2012, the ban on the right

to strike on civil aviation workers was lifted⁴⁸; however, the 305 workers were not be recruited back. Due to the conflicts with the collective bargaining of 2013, Hava-İş decided to go on strike in order to provide the 305 workers with being hired back and to enhance working standards of workers in accordance with the international standards. According to Hava-İş, 1500 workers participated in the strike in rotation. When it is considered that Hava-İş has nearly 13 thousand 500 worker members in the Turkish Airlines, participation rate—approximately 1 percent—is very low. Although the employee and the government have a deterrent role in that, it is obvious that the relations between members and the union are limited (Çelik, 2013). However, permanence and persistence of Hava-İş regarding the Strike, has shown that it has a different stance from TURK-IS, being not pro-government. The strike, moreover, has significance for this research to study on unionist nature of the union and class identities of its members, to understand how this reflects on the approach to the Kurdish question. The analysis, therefore, aims to search differences between the strikers and non-strikers, on the interpretations of the Kurdish question.

Besides, as an influential trade union in the current strike Hava-İş is criticized for staying far from the Kurdish question by representing ‘white Turks⁴⁹, who have higher level of socioeconomic status. Unlike Petrol-İş, it is not organized in the Kurdish region, and does not indicate a clear opinion on the Kurdish question. Despite the lack of a clear statement ignoring or supporting the Kurdish movement, its president's refusal to representatives of the BDP who wanted to visit the strike raises the question of Hava-İş's position to Kurdish movement. Sebahat Tuncel's tweet which stated “Hava-İş rejected our visit due to today's being May 19, saying that “the process is fragile, Kurds, don't come” (Odatv, 2013) can be interpreted as a sign that the union has a discriminative attitude towards Kurds. In accordance with these circumstances of the two trade unions, I aimed to explore how Petrol-İş's and Hava-İş's class definitions and

⁴⁸ Sendika.org, October 19, 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.sendika.org/2012/10/sivil-havacilikta-grev-yasagi-kalkti/>

⁴⁹ The concept of ‘White Turks’ mostly refers to the bourgeoisie class of Turks who have Turkish and Sunni origins (Çalışkan, 4 June 2009). In the case of Hava-İş, it is thought that only white Turks are eligible to work in the aviation line which provides higher economic standards. Thus, Kurds are considered as excluded from this work line and the union.

the workers' different levels of self-identification with the working class affect their interpretation of the Kurdish question.

CHAPTER V: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This chapter is composed of three sections which analyze secondary data and interviews with the trade unions, Petrol-İş and Hava-İş. The first and second sections are going to focus on the unions separately, whereas the third section will make a comparison between the two. The aim of the chapter is to answer the following questions:

- how do unions and their members define the working class in terms of its position in economy, society and politics, and who fits into the working class?
- how do they position unionism in class movements?
- how do they consider the evolution of class concept and unionism?
- how do they compare class movements with identity movements?
- how do they define the Kurdish question in terms of its causes and consequences?
- how do they consider everyday practices of Kurds in the working place and the union?

The first and second sections include the same structure. Firstly, the definition of the working class and unionization understanding will be analyzed through using some documents of the unions, the interview with the union presidents, and mostly focusing on interviews with the union members. Secondly, views on identity movements in comparison to class movements⁵⁰ will be discussed. Thirdly, the definition of the Kurdish question and views on every day practices of Kurds in working places and unions will be analyzed. The last section of the chapter will make a comparison between the two unions.

⁵⁰ It is unquestionable that union movements are not the only means of class movements. However, since I studied on unions as representatives of class movements, I use the idioms of class movements and union movements interchangeably.

5.1. Petrol-İş

5.1.1. Unionism and Definition of the Working Class

Petrol-İş, being opponent to yellow unionism in TURK-IS, has become one of the pioneers of the Platform of Union of Forces (*Sendikal Güçbirliği Platformu, SGBP*) which calls for class solidarity against neo-liberalism. It has often taken a stand on the issues related to the political, social and economic agenda of Turkey. Even if Petrol-İş does not use a very sharp discourse on the main mission of the unions which was a socialist revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, it declares that “it maintains a historical struggle of the working class for equality and independence against capitalism which creates an unequal and unjust world” in its 26th General Meeting in 2013 (Petrol-İş Web, 2013, p.1). As demonstrated in the same meeting decisions, it also supports the idea of a ‘different world’ created with the struggle of union of workers against imperialism. Moreover, Petrol-İş does not hesitate to declare that “it is in solidarity with the social and political forces which struggle for these aims” (Petrol-İş Web, 2013, p.1).

The interview with the union manager confirms this view. Concerning the mission of the union, he states that

“It is a trade union that is a pioneer and progressive in unionism, having a scientific point of view on class movements, aiming for class struggle, and being concerned and taking a stand on democracy and human rights. It is not only because of the leadership (of the union), but also the momentum of the members” (53, Istanbul, 18.09.2013).

Thus, on the one hand, it is not difficult to claim that its fight against capitalism in theory is clear, signaling to some extent that its discourse is close to the Marxist doctrine. On the other hand, underlining some concepts, such as democracy, justice or human rights, indicates that the union also cares about these concepts brought by the contemporary world. However, ‘the momentum of the members’ is questionable when the members’ interviews are considered. The views on the nature of unionism in Petrol-İş are various. It is very hard to speak of an existence of homogeneity among the workers concerning all questions asked.

Despite some critiques on unionism in Turkey and particularly in Petrol-İş, most of the interviews touch upon the idea that Petrol-İş is one of the best unions in taking

side with workers and concerning democratic elections of the unionists. For example, a union representative in the factory of *Bayer*, Ali (44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013) states “I saw the democratic structure of Petrol-İş, and became a candidate to be a union representative”. Moreover, while a worker is criticizing unionism in Turkey, he compares Petrol-İş with other unions by arguing that “our union is democratic, in fact. In some unions, workers do not know where the union room is” (Murat, 33, Istanbul, 24.09.2013). Only one of the workers, Salih, criticizes particularly Petrol-İş due to an experience he had. He demonstrates that after he had a work accident and was fired, the union did not do anything to hire him back; but he was hired with the help of the manager of human resources at Bayer. Therefore, he states

“I do not trust have in the union [...] It exists only on paper. It is an instrument. The employee gets benefit from the union. Workers are fired despite the union [...] Generally, all unions are like this. The top of the unions benefits from the pie, the rent. General Presidents rarely change” (Salih, 40, Istanbul, 19.09.2013)

Not surprisingly, Salih does not consider being unionized as beneficial. Moreover, he states that “I strung along with the system by being unionized in 2003 [the year he started working at Bayer]. If I did not, I would face the opposition of 300 workers at Bayer” (Salih, 40, Istanbul, 19.09.2013). However, it is not the case for other interviewed workers at Bayer, although most of them do not personally have an experience of benefitting from unionization. The benefits of unionization are specified as better working conditions such as higher wages, overtime paying, social places in the factory (Ali, 44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013), raising awareness of workers and contributing to class struggle (Murat, 33, Istanbul, 24.09.2013; Şeyhmus, 30, Istanbul, 24.09.2013), and job security (Osman, 38, Istanbul, 27.09.2013). According to some workers, these benefits are also based on the nature of Bayer Administration in addition to the union. As in the case of Salih who defines the employee as ‘faithful’ since they rehired him, the union representative Ali states that “[...] all my friends are treated decently, here. This is because of the culture of this factory. The employee is aware that we are important actors, and they make us feel that” (44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013). Hence, it can be claimed that the culture of unionism at Bayer has helped the union to maintain its existence.

Right after its foundation in the 1960s⁵¹, the workers of Bayer Chemistry and Medicine Factory were unionized. Thus, unionist culture of Bayer has been rooted for many years. Bayer workers enjoy mostly acquired rights. It is observed that this culture has affected the workers' views on unionism both negatively and positively. On the one hand, trust in the union has been created; on the other hand, it leads the workers to be indifferent or passive in unionism. For example, another union representative Uğur who is younger than Ali demonstrates "since we are free-riders, it (unionization) is not very important to us" (44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013). Similarly, Murat who demonstrates that he used to be a member of an illegal political organization states that

"In time, the union has gained lots of things. The people who had class consciousness started unionism, here. The first strike after the 1980 coup was started in our factory. Today, not my co-workers, but retired workers of Bayer participate in the protests" (33, Istanbul, 24.09.2013).

This indifference in unionism is explained by the changes in the political, economic and social conjuncture of Turkey and the world. When they are asked them to compare unionism in the past and the present, all of the eight workers at Bayer agreed on the idea that unionism was much better in the past, especially in the 1970s. The reasons behind this negative change in unionism are grounded on different factors. These are neoliberal economic policies, a-politicization by the 1980 coup, individualization, the AKP government policies on the working class, different levels of income, and corruption of unionism and decline of class consciousness in line with these changes.

A-politicization after the 1980s is one of the most popular answers concerning the decline of unionism in Turkey. Being involved in a leftist political organization, Murat demonstrates that

"After 1980, people start to think that unions which are subordinated to the governments are indifferent (to the problems of the country) NGOs [...] Today, unions only promise for protecting workers' rights and raising the wages. However, the major aim of unions should not be these. They should have bigger missions. Unions' political identities have been removed. In the 1970s, unions had a political identity. Unions were socialists, Marxists, and

⁵¹ Bayer, Türkiye. Retrieved from:
http://www.bayer.com.tr/ebbsc/cms/en/BayerTurk/Bayer_Turk_History.html

leftists. But now, they are apolitical; consequently, unions are considered only as protectors of rights, and workers stay inactive” (33, Istanbul, 24.09.2013).

A Kurdish worker who migrated to Istanbul from Elazığ, Hasan also refers to Marx, explaining ideological changes in time as;

“Until the 1990s there was communism. The discourse, such as the rights of the workers and exploitation was in this line [...] Das Capital⁵² was read. The principle of equality existed. People came together for this purpose. After communism collapsed, people began to believe in capitalism. In the free market economy, people do all kinds of knavery. People are being individualized and degenerated. Unions struggle within the system, but against exploitation” (40, Istanbul, 30.09.2013).

In addition to Murat and Hasan, Ali specifically points out the ideological changes with their effects on political, economic and social lives, arguing “today, unions, neoliberal economic policies, the employee and the media try to individualize people to prevent them from being organized” (44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013). Although all these workers do not identify these changes under the name of neo-liberalism, it is understood that they are aware of the changes brought by neo-liberalism, such as a-politicization, individualization and free market economy.

Another Kurdish worker Şeyhmus touches upon the similar thoughts related with a-politicization from a different perspective. He makes a link between rising Turkish nationalism and decline of unionism, underlining the ideological change. He argues that

“Today’s unionism cannot be compared to unionism carried out by DISK (in the 1960s and 1970s). Now, unionism is carried out within the system. [...] The 1980 coup made a clear cut. Intimidation policies have been implemented, which continue today. [...] By the emergence of the Kurdish Question after the mid-1980s, people tended to support nationalism which was systematically imposed by the state. Since, a perception is created as if people are the PKK partisans when they identify themselves as a worker or union member. If people adopted their class struggle as much as their national feelings, it would not be like that. Now, this generation is a-political, but we have to be politicized” (Şeyhmus, 30, Istanbul, 24.09.2013).

⁵² Das Capital was a famous work piece of Karl Marx.

Some workers indirectly relate decline in unionism to rise of education and the effects of different income levels of workers. This understanding signals the factors that are used as reasons for weakening class as an important variable for social stratification. As it is explained in the second chapter, rise of education (Melucci, 1989) and income levels (Clark et al., 2001) are considered as the factors which weaken people's self-identification with class. These factors indirectly lead unionism to decline, according to some workers at Bayer. For example, one of the union representatives, Uğur argues that the workers at Bayer are not from the poor, which hardens unionization since the rich is not interested in unionization. Similarly, the resentful worker Salih (40) divides the working class into their economic levels, stating that

“There are elite workers, for instance. When I went to Ankara for a protest, I saw that we were very well dressed; the brands were Nike, Adidas. The others, for example, the workers came from Zonguldak⁵³ had no coats but old shoes, torn shirts. We see ourselves superior; we cannot create coherence. I think peace will never come. If that man (a worker from Zonguldak) earns three thousands Turkish Liras, he immediately changes” (40, Istanbul, 19.09.2013).

The manager of Petrol-İş also identifies different levels of income which have been caused by neo-liberal policies as factious in the working class. He states that

“Due to the division of sectors, workers have different levels of income. Moreover, neo-liberal policies, declining of wages and costs, increase of cheap labor, and the employee attack (focusing more on profits, exploiting the working class more, by the neoliberal policies) by the mid-1990s have led workers' wages to be lower than the older workers'. This sometimes causes separation among workers”(53, Istanbul, 18.09.2013).

I have, moreover, encountered discussions about different income levels of workers who work in the same conditions, but have different wages due to the years they enter the work. While Salih explains why unionism is not successful in organizing workers to join in a protest, he says “people are saying at Bayer: he gets three thousands TL, I get one thousand, then he should go (to the protest)” (40, Bayer, 19.09.2013).

In addition to economic-based divisions, rise of education among workers, in general, is thought as not positively influential in the rise of unionism. This indirect and

⁵³ Zonguldak City mostly has mine workers who work in very harsh conditions with low wages.

relatively negative effect of higher education levels is explained through comparing unionism in the past and the present. It is important to clear out that the manager and the workers do not identify rise of education among workers as leading them to be less interested in unionism; however, they mostly express that although education degrees were lower in the past, workers were more sensitive about their rights and unionism. Therefore, rise of education is not considered as a direct factor which weakens 'class' or unionism, but a fact brought by the new social, political and economic conjuncture in which unionism is damaged. For example, while Ali explains negative changes in unionism, he expresses the following:

“In the 15th -16th September Resistance, the working class was graduated from primary or secondary schools. But, these workers including other workers from different confederations stopped life in Istanbul. Or think about the May 1st 1977 event to which more than one million people joined. Now, we have difficulties to persuade workers to join together on the 1st May although it is a holiday. We think ourselves as more educated, but do not know how to view life from our class perspective. Their (workers in the past) class consciousness was more advanced” (44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013).

As it is understood, Ali does not consider rise of education as a reason for decline in unionism, but he also does not identify higher levels of education as a means for spreading class consciousness. He relates decline of unionism to the ideological changes in politics, economics and society, as it is quoted above.

In direction with these changes, Ali and many other workers criticize the AKP government's policies on workers and unionism. It is commonly thought that by the AKP governance yellow unionism has become widespread through emergence of pro-government unions (Ali, 44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013; Murat, 33, Istanbul, 24.09.2013). As a result, unions are considered as far away to acknowledge class concept (Şeyhmus, 30, Istanbul, 24.09.2013), and people's trust towards unions have declined (Ali, 44, Bayer, 19.09.2013). In direction with the statistics, workers are aware that unionization rates have declined by the economic policies of sub-contracting and privatization. (Osman, 38, Istanbul, 27.09.2013). Moreover, workers who support politicization of unions argue that unionization has been marginalized in the eyes of the people (Murat, 33, Istanbul, 24.09.2013; Şeyhmus, 30, Istanbul, 24.09.2013; Ali, 44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013).

Therefore, as a result of all these factors, today's unionism in general is considered as weaker than in the past to protect workers and shape the political agenda of the country.

Regarding the definition of the working class, the manager of the union defines the union's perspective as "being in accordant with the general sociological definitions" (53, Istanbul, 18.09.2013):

"The working class does not highlight any differences, but perceives them as richness. We think that the major difference is between the oppressed and the oppressor or exploiter and exploited" (53, Istanbul, 18.09.2013)

It can be claimed that this definition of the working class is in accordance with the Marxist definition which stratifies society as the proletariat (the oppressed/exploited) and the bourgeoisie (the oppressor/exploiter). Concerning 'the other differences', it seems that the manager's view is also close to the classical approach on other identities than class, prioritizing class identity. Although he does not claim that other identities should be oppressed, he considers class identity is the major one.

In order to learn whether the manager considers a difference on the definition or range of the working class by the time, as some scholars (Pakulski and Waters, 1996; Clark & Lipset, 1991) suggest, it is asked whether he sees an evolution of the concept of the working class. The answer is

"The range of the working class cannot change, in fact. For instance, even if white collar workers do not consider themselves as workers, it does not change the reality that they are workers; because class of a person is determined with her/his position against means of production. Hence, you can be a doctor in a hospital who gains a very high wage, but you are still a worker. We have also strived for unionizing all workers in a factory or an office. Unqualified workers who are sub-contracted and qualified workers who are told that they are not workers are tried to be separated from unions. However, there is no difference in our perspective" (53, Istanbul, 18.09.2013).

As it is seen, the manager of Petrol-Iş defines the working class in accordance with people's position against the means of production, as Marxism argues. Consequently, he includes white collar workers who participate in production with their labor in the working class. He, moreover, underlines that there is an effort to prevent workers from identifying themselves as workers.

Regarding the workers of Bayer, they have different definitions and different levels of self-identification with the working class. Some workers define the working class in accordance with the managers' definition, which is close to the Marxist doctrine. Many of them touch upon the idea that the working class is oppressed. All these workers also name themselves as a member of the working class. The Kurdish worker Şeyhmus, for example, agrees with the manager in the definition of the working class which includes white collar workers demonstrating,

“Unfortunately, the majority of the people in Turkey, who maintain their life as workers, do not consider themselves as workers. Firstly, they should make themselves believe that they are workers, although they have differences. They should form a class. If we do not organize the working class against the employee and the state, our struggle becomes meaningless. In the global world, everyone who goes to work in the morning is a worker. In our factory, the managers also clock on; so they are workers, too” (Şeyhmus, 30, Istanbul, 24.09.2013).

In terms of the suppression of the working class Osman and Cüneyt clearly define the working class as oppressed. Osman, for example, says “the the working class is a team of laborer (*amele*) [...] It is oppressed by the employee. The capitalist is always at the top” (38, Istanbul, 27.09.2013). Similarly, Cüneyt suggests that “the the working class is an oppressed class. It undertakes all burdens of the production”(43, Istanbul, 02.10.2013). Many other workers who do not specifically touch upon the suppression or range of the working class also affirm what Şeyhmus, Osman and Cüneyt say. However, only two of them, Salih (40) who does not believe in unionism and Uğur who is a union representative at Bayer do not define the working class referring to its suppression and who workers are. As it is quoted above, Salih sees the working class as divided with their economic status, naming himself as an elite worker. However, it is surprising that a union representative, Uğur (33, Istanbul, 19.09.2013) states that “there is no the working class, and I am not from the working class [...] it is something like saying that I am a socialist when there is no socialism”. Although his duty is to organize workers as a union representative, he relates his pessimism about unionism and the working class with unconsciousness of workers, claiming that “no one is aware that they are workers; they excessively embrace the employee” (Uğur, 33, Istanbul, 19.09.2013) In accordance with their the working class definitions and views on unionism, Salih and Uğur hesitate naming themselves as workers or members of the working class.

In fact, pessimism of Uğur is shared by many other workers, concerning unconsciousness of the working class. When workers are asked to define the working class, they mostly touch upon unconsciousness of the working class of today, rather than defining what it is. It is due to the fact that many workers associate the concept of the working class with organization/unionization. The older union representative Ali, for example, defines the working class as “unaware of their class values and not capable of adopting them”, specifying conscious workers as organized/unionized (44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013). Along the similar line with Ali, politically active worker Murat says that “the the working class in Turkey is unconscious with no aims” (33, Istanbul, 24.09.2013). The reasons behind this ‘unconsciousness’ are the same with the ones that lead unionism to be weakened, according to the workers. Although they agree on the idea that they are members of the working class that lacking class consciousness in Turkey, the factors which affect their self-identification with the working class is various, mostly depending on their personal backgrounds.

When it is asked which factors affect workers’ self-identification with the working class, workers mostly refer to their political ideologies rather than economic and social status. In order to give specific information about the workers’ backgrounds, which helps to understand how their personalities affect views on class, more examples will be given. The union representative Ali, for example, states that

“I used to talk with my friends about the working class, labor and the working class revolution during my university years. My political view grounds on the working class [...] I am a victim of the 1980 coup. My brother was in jail; I experienced these difficulties. I have a leftist background. If economic status was effective (in self-identification with the working class), all of the poor would become unionized and strugglers”(44, Bayer, 19.09.2013).

Another worker Murat also thinks that self-identification with the working class is not linked only to economic levels of people, arguing that

“I am a member of the working class, having goals. I have supported many worker protests [...] I saw class divisions in Turkey when I was a member of an illegal political organization at my 16. I have a goal, and tried to reach it [...] I recognized that there was a line. You have to decide which side of the line you belong to. You read books and create a different world and utopias in your mind. When you realize this reality, you try to think how

you can make this ideology real [...] If I agreed with my family, I would support the AKP [...] Economic level was not effective for me. My family has a business; they have a higher economic status than the neighborhood” (Murat, 33, Istanbul, 24.09.2013).

Kurdish worker Şeyhmus touches upon politicization which shapes his identification with the working class, Kurdishness and Alevi-ness. He argues that

“I support all worker struggles. I have also supported other unions, such as Hava-İş. I am from a political family. All of them live by their labor. It is related to their view of life. I have not grown up in very difficult conditions. My father is a migrant from Dersim. My grandparents always talk about how they lived there. I have always lived as a stranger in this country. In the 3rd grade of primary school, my teacher from Kars encouraged me to sing a Kurdish song. Then, my friends scared me with saying that the police would attack me. This is related to the process you have lived through. Until I was thirty years old, my Kurdish, Alevi and opponent identities have been effective” (Şeyhmus, 30, Istanbul, 24.09.2013).

While Ali, Murat and Şeyhmus do not strongly associate economic status with self-identification with the working class, underlining political ideologies which are acquired by experiences or family backgrounds, Osman points out that being a worker is a form of suppression, which teaches self-identification with the working class. He says that “I did not know anything about unions before. I have learned by being suppressed, here” (Osman, 38, Istanbul, 27.09.2013). Another Kurdish worker Cüneyt also emphasizes personally being suppressed that influences self-identification:

“I am absolutely from the oppressed class. As a person who is excluded and has lived in poverty, I am a worker. Regardless of people’s religion, ideology, race or rank, they are workers. It is much easier for people who have lived in a closed society to adopt unions. These people are more courageous, I see that. Workers from the bourgeoisie origin are not like that. Workers who know how difficult to earn bread are closer to unions” (43, Istanbul, 02.10.2013).

Cüneyt does not clearly underline that his Kurdishness influences his belonging to the oppressed class; however, he points out that his exclusion is also linked to the place where he was grown up, the Kurdish region. Hence, the Kurdish workers Şeyhmus and Cüneyt directly or indirectly suggest that their Kurdishness has played a role in defining themselves as part of the oppressed class. This oppression has two common sides for the two workers, being a Kurd and being a worker. Regarding the Turkish workers, it is hard to single out a common point for all three, Ali, Murat and Osman. While Ali and

Murat emphasize personal political views which might be acquired by experiences, Osman only touches upon what he experiences.

All in all, the discourse of Petrol-İş members about unionism and the definition of the working class is close the Marxist discourse, according to its by-law and the manager's speech. In the factory of Bayer, some workers also touch upon the Marxist ideology in defining the working class or unionism before. All of them agree on the idea that unionism was better in the past, being aware of the economic, social and political changes. Except Salih and Uğur, all workers define the working class referring to its suppression, naming themselves as workers and consider unionism as beneficial. Their self-identification with the working class is affected by their political ideologies, economic levels and experiences. The two of the Kurdish workers, Şeyhmus and Cüneyt link their suppression to double effects, Kurdish-ness and worker-ness.

5.1.2. Unionist Identity and Identity Politics

In order to understand the nature of the unionist identity, it is asked to the manager and the workers whether they consider unionist identity as a unifying one. Not surprisingly, the manager argues that being a unionized worker is a unifying identity. It is explained by the argument he states below:

“People’s behaviors are class-based if they are not manipulated [...] When you act in accordance with your class and you are unionized, then, you are fired. Then, you feel the difference between ‘us and them’, automatically. The union backs these workers morally and materially. It gives theoretical education to make this consciousness permanent. Workers become aware of that in life. Actually, it is not difficult; on the contrary, there is a deception effort which prevents people from feeling as part of the same class. The system, the hegemony is based on stupefying people” (53, Istanbul, 18.09.2013).

Referring to the concept of ‘false consciousness’ in Marxism, the manager of the union sees the working class/union identity as unifying. Moreover, he once again touches upon the effort which tries to alienate people from identifying themselves as workers, as in the case of white collar workers.

Workers have different opinions on ‘unifying’ identity of unionism/class. Ali who does not think that economic levels of people affect their self-identification with class

suggests that “workers are only sensitive about wages and physical working conditions, but it is difficult to organize them from a class perspective by politicizing” (44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013). By arguing so, he means that it is not sufficient to only act in accordance with workers’ economic advantages; because being a part of the working class requires more, which is politicization. Şeyhmus agrees with Ali on unifying nature of unionism when workers and unionism are politicized, naming unionism “as a chance to unite the working class” (30, Istanbul, 24.09.2013). Although Murat is one of the supporters of politicization of unionism, he argues that political differences harm unionism because of workers’ lack of class consciousness, stating that

“Unionism is not unifying; because there has been differentiation for years. In the last elections, for example, the Alevis make their candidates be elected while in Aliğa⁵⁴ the leftist candidates are elected. Today in Batman, Hizbullah⁵⁵ is powerful; however, I learned that no one could be elected apart from the PKK’s candidates five years ago. Political identity is very important. This causes a separation. People ask if the union only belongs to Kurds or the leftists. Political differences damage unionism. In the recent years, unions are established in accordance to the political trends; such as HAK-IŞ [...] Unions do not have a single discourse; there is no Türklers⁵⁶ anymore. A person from HAK-IŞ talks about Allah while we are concerned with the working class. By the 1980s, an Islamic social structure has formed, which lead people to alienate from the working class” (33, Bayer, 24.09.2013).

The union representative Uğur and the Kurdish worker Cüneyt touch upon similar arguments that unions cannot be united on the basis of the working class, due to the different political ideologies of them. Thus, it can be claimed that many workers are pessimistic about unifying nature of unionism although they think that it should be. The reasons behind this are mostly explained by different ideologies’ factious effects. According to them, since today’s political trend of Turkey is closer to Islamic conservatism by the AKP government; political differentiations are mostly shaped around this circle.

⁵⁴ Aliğa is a district of Izmir where Petrol-Iş is unionized.

⁵⁵ It is a Sunni Islamic group which is also organized in the Kurdish region, being against the PKK. Retrieved from: <http://www.turkishweekly.net/article/180/turkish-hezbollah-hizbullah-kurdish-hezbollah.html>

⁵⁶ Kemal Türkler is a founder member of DISK.

So as to learn how the union and the workers of Bayer view identity-based organizations whether they prioritize class movements or identity movements, it is asked whether they consider identity movements as harmful for class or not. While the manager of Petrol-Iş does not identify identity movements as harmful for class movements, workers' answers are mostly linked to their ideologies. The manager argues that

“Identities based on sexuality, ethnicity and religion are the sources of richness unique to Anatolia. The only difference in the society is the difference between the oppressor and the oppressed. The other differences are sub-identities. If you ask whether they need these identities; it depends on personal preferences. They (identities) should be protected and guaranteed. If they are left alone, they will not be harmful; why would they? We watch the news; it is said that ethnic or denominational differences will cause conflicts in some countries. I do not understand this. It is not normal. It is absolutely provoked. Does a person stab a neighbor only because he/she does not like himself/herself? Differences do not cause a danger by itself, but they are turned into (a danger) [...] Our union always thinks like that, and we dignify differences (53, Istanbul, 18.09.2013).

While the manager identifies social stratification, he refers to the economic one, defining ethnic, sexual and religious identities as having secondary importance. Being in the line with the classical approach in class, it is, however, hard to claim that he supports suppression of other identities in class. By saying that the identities should be protected, and they are not dangerous for class movements, the manager acknowledges the importance of these identities and movements; however, he makes a hierarchy between them.

Workers, on the other hand, have opposing views on the subject. While one union representative Ali argues that ethnic or denominational differences are not factious in Petrol-Iş, another union representative Uğur suggests that they do. Ali says that

“In the Central Office of Petrol-Iş, people from different segments come together. One of them is from Batman, for example. There is an equal distribution. I believe in a different sect than the majority. I am an Alevi; however, I am elected as the union representative for the second time. When a proper perspective is provided for the working class, the ethnic or religious identity of representatives is not important” (44, Bayer, 19.09.2013).

However, Uğur considers identity movements as unnecessary and states that “these identities should not harm unionism, but they do. People vote or do not vote in accordance with being an Alevi or Kurdish. It damages class consciousness” (33, Istanbul, 19.09.2013). Although Salih claims that different identities do not divide the working class, he criticizes politicization of these identities, saying that

“I see people from different identities in the worker protests. For instance, I saw people coming from Batman; they acted politically by showing Öcalan’s posters. I cannot consider those as my worker brothers. We went there for the pension law; we cannot be united like that” (40, Istanbul, 19.09.2013).

Osman agrees with Salih on the politicization of identities, especially of Kurds. Although he claims that there is no discrimination in the union and at Bayer since the union unifies people from different identities, he does not support identity movements, referring to the Kurdish movement, by asking

“Why are they organized? I live in Okmeydanı⁵⁷. Why does a person set fire a bus he/she gets on? I am not against Kurds; I have many Kurdish friends. I am affected by the pepper gas thrown there, as well. I join in the protests. the last May 1st ⁵⁸, I was extremely exposed to pepper gas. Why do we do that? We do for job security and worker rights. People need to be hurt to protest. You should be so hurt that you can respond to that. I do not understand these people” (Osman, 38, Bayer, 27.09.2013)

Although Osman joins illegal protests to which the police attack, he does not have an empathic attitude towards the Kurdish protests in Okmeydanı. It is due to the fact that he does not consider Kurds as having valid reasons to protest while workers, including him, are right to do. Osman is closer to the idea of suppression of ethnic identities in class, without making a connection between oppression of workers and oppression of Kurds.

⁵⁷ Okmeydanı is a district of Istanbul where Kurdish political protests frequently take place.

⁵⁸ In the 1st May of 2013, some workers and unions came together in Taksim Square where was banned by the AKP government. During the day, clashes between workers and the police took place. Retrieved from: <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/yasam/146326-1-mayis-2013-kunye-ve-bilanco>

Active workers in unionism like Osman, Ali and Murat do not agree with him. Both of them think that the Kurdish movement contributes to class movements. Ali explains its reason as the following:

“Kurdish people are politicized due to the Kurdish Question. In the factories which mostly Kurds work, Kurdish workers who join the Kurdish movement are also participating in the class movements. It is because they are supported by socialist, leftists groups and workers. Deri-Iş, for example is a union in which Kurdish workers are the majority, and it is a very powerful union” (44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013).

Murat adds

“The Kurdish movement strengthens class movements or even any movement in Turkey; because their struggle has provided them with many things in practical and intellectual senses [...] If class struggle was more powerful in Turkey, we would recognize these identities more easily. Since there is no proper class struggle in Turkey, we have problems with political and ethnic differences” (33, Istanbul, 24.09.2013).

By claiming so, Ali and Murat make a link between the struggle of Kurds and workers. The common point of these two workers is their leftist political background and active roles in class movements.

All three Kurdish workers, moreover, agree on the point that identity movements are not dangerous for class movements and the working class. Hasan and Cüneyt suggest that when the point is to earn bread, other differences do not cause any harms. Şeyhmus, moreover, adds

“Kurds, Alevi and workers are very right to organize. When they are unified, very important developments will happen in Turkey. They do not cause any harm. It becomes ridiculous to expect all people to be unionized, or only join in the Alevi or Kurdish movements. It is beneficial for each community to organize” (30, Istanbul, 24.09.2013).

Şeyhmus interprets identity movements and class movements separately; however, he does not think that they harm one another. By supporting their cooperation, he stands for multiple subjectivities in class.

To sum this part up, there is not a strong correlation between supporting unionism and supporting identity movements. Some workers cannot have an emphatic perspective on identity movements although they participate in class struggle. Workers who have political identities highly support identity movements, and consider them as beneficial

to class struggle. The Kurdish workers do not identify identity movements as factious for the working class, either.

5.1.3. The Kurdish Question and Every day Practices of Kurds

Petrol-Iş is one of the unions that is concerned with the Kurdish question. As it is explained in the fourth chapter, it has tried to attract to the issue through its reports, magazines and education of workers⁵⁹. In 1993, for example, led by the president of Petrol-Iş, Münir Ceylan, a report was prepared on the Kurdish question after a trip by some unionists from TURK-IŞ to the Kurdish districts; Erzurum, Ağrı, Van, Bitlis, Batman, İdil, Cizre, Şırnak, Nusaybin and Diyarbakır (Kapmaz & Gökçe, 2007). Although it did not suggest solutions to the question, it provided information about the demands of the local community. Under the title of ‘the East and Southeast Reviews’, the report pointed out both economic improvement of the East and Southeast Turkey and improvement of cultural rights of the Kurdish people. In the same year, Münir Ceylan was sentenced to imprisonment due to his criticisms of the Anti-Terror Law of 1991. He identified extrajudicial executions, mass arrestments, losses in custodies and killings of people by soldiers in the Kurdish region as ‘state terror’. The decision of his imprisonment got big reactions, and he was highly supported by Petrol-Iş through formal objections, publications and hunger strikes (Petrol-Iş Yayın-64, 2000). Signaling significant points on the issue in those years, Petrol-Iş, moreover, published a booklet in 1997, called as ‘Peace is in our hands’ which identified the Kurdish question as one of the important problems of Turkey with its economic, political and social sides.

In accordance with the political conjuncture, the discourse of Petrol-Iş about the Kurdish question has been shaped. While it viewed the question from a class perspective, highlighting imperialist and capitalist forces in the Kurdish question in the late 1990s, it began to emphasize democratization and the peace process by the mid-2000s. For example, in a report of 2000, it is stated that ethnic differences and conflicts (identified as ‘superficial’) were used deliberately by the capitalist forces to prevent a bigger class movement; therefore, workers’ unitary force is able to solve the question

⁵⁹ Ali, Murat and Şeyhmus have told that Petrol-Iş gives an active membership education in which the Kurdish question is one of the discussion topics.

(Petrol-Iş Yayın-86, 2000, p. 111). However, in the last General Meeting in 2013, it is stated that “the solution is to follow the path which aims for democracy, peace and social togetherness without compensating unitary nature of our country” (Öztaşkın, 2013, p.4), leaving aside the idea that class struggle is the only solution for the question. Although it is not a very sharp transformation, it can be interpreted that some political developments; such as the 2009 Kurdish Initiative and the Peace Process started in 2012, and the election of Mustafa Mesut Tekik— the chairman of the Batman branch— for the Central Office of Petrol-Iş might be effective in underlining democracy and peace rather than economic factors.

The manager of Petrol-Iş also underlines democratic and peaceful solutions of the problem, emphasizing recognition of the Kurdish ethnic identity, in addition to the economic sides of the question. The manager views the reasons of the problem as failures of the nation-state structure. It is explained by the manager that this structure is based on firstly, the standardization of people, and secondly, the single market. By standardization, he refers to the assimilation/suppression of people. By the single market, he touches on the effects of feudalism in the Kurdish region. Although he argues that ethnic conflicts mostly have economic factors, he underlines the importance of national problems and cultural demands, stating that

“If you say that people joined the guerilla because they were unemployed, it means you did not understand the problem. Even if people have had economical welfare in the region, they would still have national problems and cultural demands. Their way of struggle might be different. If people are humiliated, de-identified, and unemployed, their style of struggle can be different” (the manager, 53, Istanbul, 18.09.2013).

The above quote shows that the manager develops an empathy with the Kurdish movement which includes the armed struggle. He, moreover, hesitates from reducing the Kurdish question to an economic one, through acknowledging both sides of the problem. His suggestions to the solutions are in the same direction:

“Kurdish people have fundamental rights. These rights should be respected, and the state should abandon denialist and assimilationist policies. Under the condition of non-violent actions, all kinds of rights and freedoms should be advocated. We think that whatever they want about their identities—for example, education in mother tongue—should be guaranteed by the constitution [...] All nations living in that region should be able to live in a

country where they take decisions with their own free will. I think the class side of the question should not be ignored. Today, Turkey and the world capitalists consider the region as a field to be exploited in terms of raw materials and cheap labor. If they encourage peace to suppress people economically and to capitalize more, blow it! [...] Today, the old feudal structure in the region is weakened. Although we do not approve, it is related with the guerilla. For example, by the existence of women forces in the guerilla, men-women relationships have modernized, but its costs are very heavy. We support the end of war, not pursuing the goals of the capitalist but for a peaceful, just and equal environment” (the manager, 53, Istanbul, 18.09.2013).

As it is seen, the manager of Petrol-Iş proposes solutions through taking both class and identity sides of the question into consideration. He also signals his support to self-determination of nations in accordance with the Leninist ideology.

The manager is not the only person who refers to the self-determination of nations in Petrol-Iş. The political union representative Ali also touches upon this principle of Leninism in a conversation with a worker in the union room. While a discussion on the Kurdish question is being made, some workers in the room criticize the ‘secessionist’ demands of Kurds, by stating that acceptance of their demands leads all minorities to separate from Turkish territories. Ali responds to this argument by asking “have you ever heard about the right to self-determination of nations?” (44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013). Hence, being supportive of this principle, Ali points out the identity-based side of the question, but also considering the identity politics not efficient for solution, arguing that

“It is not logical and humane to forcibly teach Turkish to a kid who does not know Turkish in the primary school. Our friends used to listen to Kurdish music, secretly. [...] We should support their demand for learning Kurdish [...] I support peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question. It contributes to the democratic movements of Turkey. We, the Kurdish and Turkish workers, are exploited equally. If it (the Kurdish movement) underlines only Kurdishness, the ultimate point (for the resolution process) will not be successful” (44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013).

In defining the Kurdish question, he addresses cultural rights of Kurds; however, he does not find the Kurdish ethnic identity as the mere point that should be touched upon for the resolution:

“I should view the Kurdish question as a human, not as a Turk. Kurds also should look from the point of international norms, rather than the Kurdish nationalistic point of view. We look at the working class from a class

perspective, but it is a very broad term. Ethnic identities provide a very narrow range”(Ali, 44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013).

Hence, he tends to consider the class struggle which fights against the oppression of the working class in which both Kurds and Turks are exploited as more preferable than identity politics which is less broad than the class movements.

The other workers who have political backgrounds, Şeyhmus and Murat identify the reason of the Kurdish question as de-recognition of identities in Turkey. Moreover, Murat’s not being Kurdish does not prevent him from having an emphatic approach to the issue. He argues that

“There is a fascistic approach to different ethnic identities in Turkey. You are whether a Turk, or nothing. People cannot speak Kurdish, are deprived of service, and cannot have education in their mother language. You are a child, and your goal posts are made of palettes of tanks. If I were, I would be hostile towards the Turkish state and soldiers” (Murat, 33, Istanbul, 24.09.2013).

Şeyhmus completely agrees with Murat on assimilation of ethnic identities, including Kurdish ethnic identity, identifying this assimilation as “a way of genocide” (30, Bayer, 24.09.2013). He, moreover, adds that

“The system has used this problem so good that it is reflected to the working class. The system considers the Kurdish question equal with the unionist or the Alevi movement. They are related to each other; however, the Kurdish movement has been used to divide the others [...] In fact, democratization of Turkey is tied to freedom of the Kurdish nation. The state cannot use the Kurdish movement as a trump [...] The system which causes the Kurdish question is the same with the system that oppresses the working class. I am trying to explain this to people. I am asking them whether they see a martyr funeral in a high class neighborhood. The system that kills eleven workers at Marmara Park⁶⁰ is the same which bombs thirty five people in Roboski⁶¹. I do not only want Kurdistan to be free; the West also should be free. Being a socialist requires this understanding”(Şeyhmus, 30, Istanbul, 24.09.2013).

⁶⁰ In the construction of the shopping mall, Marmara Park, eleven workers were burned to death. The construction company was the subcontractor (Bianet, 2012). Retrieved from <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/136861-11-isci-santiyede-yanarak-oldu>

⁶¹ In the frontier village, Roboski, 35 Kurdish civilians were bombed by the Turkish army on December 28, 2011. Retrieved from: <http://www.ihd.org.tr/index.php/baslamalarinmenu-77/ortak-baslamalarinmenu-80/2491-roboski-katliami-raporu-03-ocak-2012.html>

Şeyhmus criticizes the capitalist system which oppresses both Kurds and the working class. As he says before, being a Kurd, an Alevi, a worker and a socialist helps him to have an emphatic perspective to the other identities or movements. Şeyhmus also touches upon a critique of identity politics, which is argued by Smith (2008). Identity politics remain at the personal level, because they undermine that a person does not have to have personal experiences of oppression to be able to question it. In this line of thinking, Şeyhmus points out the ways of emphatic approaches to the other movements:

“It is not necessary to be a Kurd to understand the Kurdish question. It is related with one’s perspective. If you look at it from an ethnic and nationalist perspective, you cannot find a solution. If I were a Sunni, I would question why only mosques are built with the taxes taken from Alevis. Otherwise, peace and democracy will not be reached”(Şeyhmus, 30, Istanbul, 24.09.2013).

Another Kurdish worker, Cüneyt defines the Kurdish question mostly on the basis of his experiences. Like Ali, Murat and Şeyhmus, he thinks that the problem has started with de-recognition of the Kurdish identity by the foundation of the Turkish Republic. However, he finds the AKP initiatives as positive for resolution. He shares his experiences and agrees with Şeyhmus on the point that people do not have to be Kurdish to understand the issue, arguing that

“I can never forget that I could not enter my village. Since I was a soldier in the Kurdish region, I know very well how people were arrested without a reason, how they were thrown in holes, and all other fascists approaches” (Cüneyt, 43, Istanbul, 02.10.2013).

Regarding internal displacements, Cüneyt argues that migration took place due to the suppression of the army which evacuated villages and murdered people in the years between 1986 and 1996, putting the responsibility on the Turkish army. At that point, another Kurdish worker Hasan who refers to Marx in explaining unionism does not agree with Cüneyt and other workers who believe in the suppression of Kurds, although he has experienced the war between the Turkish army and the PKK in Elazığ. He argues that Turks and Kurds do not have problems with each other; however, “the capitalist” writes a scenario to divide the society. Hasan states that

“Ask Kurds why they migrated; they do not say that we migrated to live our culture in a better way. They came here to work, for food, for better economic standards. The ones who participate in protests claim that they

want cultural rights, but when it is asked they firstly want a job [...] I do not consider the Kurdish question as an ethnic problem. They say that Kurds are suppressed and their cultural rights are ignored. When the socialist ideology of the PKK was gone, they went towards cultural rights. If they developed their culture, they would be able to live it. Two hundred languages have disappeared in the world, who oppresses them?" (40, Istanbul, 30.09.2013).

The approaches of Salih, Osman and Uğur are similar to Hasan's. Osman who participates in illegal demonstrations of workers says that

"This problem cannot be solved even if they have all territories of Turkey or their pockets are filled. They do not live in Istanbul for their Kurdishness but for their bread [...] Some of them join in the protests. All their costs are paid with our taxes. No need for this!" (Osman, 38, Istanbul, 27.09.2013).

Resentful worker, Salih, and the other union representative who does not define himself as a member of the working class, Uğur claims that there is not a Kurdish question in Turkey. Both of them identify the reason of the conflict as stemming from the manipulation of the international forces and economic and intellectual backwardness. Salih, for example, says that

"The international forces fund them [...] If there was a sport centre or a shopping mall in there, no one would join the guerilla. If they do not like Turkey, they should work without social insurance. They are deceived because their education levels are low. 80 percent of them are ignorant [...] If a person says to me that he is a fan of Abdullah Öcalan, I have to attack him physically" (Bayer, 19.09.2013).

Thus, the common points of workers who have an emphatic approach towards the Kurdish movement are firstly, having active roles in class struggle; secondly, defining the working class with reference to Marxism, and thirdly; having leftist political backgrounds. These workers, moreover, define the issue in terms of its ethnic and economical sides. However, being active in unionism and defining the working class grounding on their suppression do not always require being emphatic to the Kurdish movement. Some workers who address the oppression of the working class and support the unionist struggle do not make a link between the oppression of Kurds and the oppression of the workers. It is also seen that being a Kurdish is not sufficient to acknowledge the identity-based side of the Kurdish question and having an emphatic approach to the Kurdish movement. When the ones who are practically and theoretically distant from class movements are considered, their common feature is being

discriminative against Kurds—referring to their low education levels—, having a reductionist discourse on the causes of the Kurdish question.

As a result, all these approaches reflect the views on the everyday practices of Kurds in the working place and the union. Not surprisingly, the workers who have emphatic approach to suppression of Kurds are very comfortable with the use of Kurdish in the factory and respect the workers who prioritize their Kurdish ethnic identity. All of the workers state that there is no discrimination against the Kurdish workers at Bayer. However, the reason behind this is explained by Ali as such:

“None of the Kurdish workers who forcibly migrated here work in unionized factories. How many Kurds work at Bayer, which employs four hundred workers? The reasons of this might be only ethnic identity or low education levels; however, big businesses do not hire people from the Kurdish region for years. Thus, they work in the sub-contracted factories. If sub-contracted factories are unionized, Kurds will be included in unionism more” (44, Istanbul, 19.09.2013).

The Kurdish worker Cüneyt confirms Ali that he got hired by means of his uncle. He also states that

“Here in Bayer, workers are hired under the hegemony of a group. During a worker recruitment, the half of the applicants are Kurdish and graduated from the best universities, but none of them get hired. It is not the fault of the German management of Bayer. If they know, they will be angry. It is the fault of bad-minded Turks at the top” (43, Bayer, 02.10.2013)

In Bayer which has few Kurdish workers, all workers argue that there is no grouping between Kurdish and Turkish workers or discrimination against Kurds, in practice. The reason behind this is explained by Kurds’ being minority in Bayer, the necessity of getting along well with each other in the factory and the union. However, two of the Kurdish workers, Cüneyt and Şeyhmus claim that although there is no visible discrimination against them in the factory and the union, they feel that the majority of the workers subconsciously have discriminative sentiments to them⁶². When it is asked to Cüneyt whether he can speak Kurdish in the factory, he says the following: “We have not come to that point yet. I speak Kurdish at home, but it does not happen here because

⁶² As I observed, workers were very comfortable while they were introducing the Roma workers, calling them as *şopar*. However, it was not the case for the Kurdish workers. Most of them stayed in silence when I asked them to introduce a Kurdish worker.

of the rooted oppressive understanding” (43, Istanbul, 02.10.2013). The discourse of some workers who does not believe in the existence of the Kurdish question confirms that they do not approve speaking Kurdish in the factory. Salih, for example, says “They can listen to Kurdish music or speak Kurdish at their homes. If you do this in front of other people, it provokes them. It is not appropriate in the factory; I get angry. Maybe, he says something bad about me, who knows?” (40, Istanbul, 19.09.2013).

All in all, in accordance with its reports and the interview with the manager, Petrol-Iş defines the working class and unionism with reference to the Marxist ideology. The social, political and economic changes by the time which have affected these definitions are explained in line with the scholars’ arguments which suggest the decline of class popularity in social stratification. However, the general opinion of the manager and the workers does not indicate that class is a forgotten variable, but is an ignored one. The causes of this ignorance are generally linked to the neo-liberal economic, political and social policies which lead people to a-politicized, individualized and being indifferent. In addition, Petrol-Iş does not isolate itself from the Kurdish question and often indicates that it supports the peaceful resolution of the issue. Although the manager considers class identity is broader—more important in a sense, he does not support the suppression of identities which are thought to be factious in the working class. Regarding workers on the Kurdish question, it is seen that being active in class movements and referring to the suppression of the working class might not create a link between being emphatic to the oppression of Kurds. It is also observed that being a Kurdish worker might not be a factor for empathizing with the cultural or economic demands of Kurds. However, when the workers who have leftist political identities, it is seen that all of them have an emphatic approach to the oppression of the Kurdish movement. Moreover, it is observed that none of the workers who are distant from class struggle are emphatic to Kurds’ oppression. Thus, being able to make a link between the oppression of Kurds and oppression of the working class is somewhat affected by the political ideologies of workers and their level of affinity to the class movements.

5.2. Hava-Iş

5.2.1. Unionism and Definition of the Working Class

Being a member of the Platform of Union of Forces (SGBP) like Petrol-Iş, Hava-Iş is also one of the opponent unions within TURK-IS. Even though the participation rate in the Turkish Airlines strike is very low, the union's persistence and determination in pressuring the government and the administration of the Turkish Airlines Inc. signals it being distant from yellow unionism. In this direction, the president of the union defines unions as "class and mass organizations" (59, Istanbul, 03.10.2013). He states

"We have a different point of view towards unions. Unions are class and mass organizations. They are the organizations in which people from different religion, language, ethnicity and sects are easily organized. Therefore, unions should be political. On the one hand, they should look after workers' benefit to raise them to power. On the other hand, they should play active roles for politicizing class struggle. They should speak about each problem the country has, being a pioneer of public opposition" (59, Istanbul, 03.10.2013).

The discourse of the president of Hava-Iş on unionism is very much compatible with the Marxist ideology which considers unions as means for the working class struggle. In order to pave the way for the class struggle, unions' necessity to politicize workers is inevitable. By claiming so, the president clearly confirms the union's stance towards politicized unionism and class politics.

During the interviews with the workers who participate in the strike, it is clearly observed that their opinions on unionism are very much related to their experiences in the strike. Out of the eight workers who joined the strike, three of them suggest that they used to be indifferent to unionism before the resistance. A Kurdish woman who used to work as a hostess before she was fired, Sinem, for example, indicates that

"I did not even know the managers of the union before. I did not have any activity in the union until the march on the May 29th. To protest the ban on the right to strike, I joined the march by shifting off. I saw the president there, and was impressed by his being trustful and democratic. Then, I participated in unionism. [...] During the resistance, I made translations voluntarily to attract the world public opinion. Supports of our brother

workers made me very happy. I am proud of what I am doing now” (28, Istanbul, 24.10.2013).

Like Sinem, the other workers who used to be passive in unionism before, Emre and Fatih suggest that while they were working, they were not interested in the union. After they were fired and got involved in the unionist movement, Emre claims that he has improved his general knowledge, broadening his perspective not to be deceived by the employee or the governments, while Fatih suggests that he highly benefits from the union materially and morally⁶³ after he got fired. It is seen that these three workers do not touch upon the benefits of unions or the roles of unions for the working class; however, they point out their personal acquisitions by being active in unionism. Although these acquisitions are not directly related to class struggle, it helps them to be familiar with what unionism means or how it should work. The president confirms this familiarity with class struggle gained by the strike, as follows:

“We talk to the friends. They admit that they can hereby understand workers on the streets who make protests against privatization, the YOK, or a topic related to the Kurdish question” (59, Istanbul, 03.10.2013).

When the three interviewees, Metin, Erdi and Koral who did not participate in the resistance are considered, it is observed that they are more distant from the concept of class struggle. On the one hand, they claim that they became a member to protect their rights which were acquired by the union; on the other hand, they are not interested in the ways to enhance these rights. Therefore, they remain passive in unionism, or define unionism on the basis of merely practical rights, not pointing out the importance of workers’ organization. Koral, for example, argues that unions become more powerful when they involve in politics; however, this involvement leads unions to go beyond their aims (24, Istanbul, 08.11.2013). By arguing so, Koral limits the aims of unions with workers’ rights which are practically beneficial for them; such as high wages or long holidays, since politics in unionism is considered as unpleasant.

The active workers in unionism touch upon the political nature of unions while they are explaining the changes in unionism by the time. Since all of them have suffered from the harsh consequences of the resistance from which they consider the responsible

⁶³ I was informed that the union pays some money to the fired strikers as long as they go to the field of strike everyday (Metin, 33, Istanbul, 22.11.2013).

as the AKP government, they—including the president of the union—mostly evaluate these changes as before the AKP and after the AKP. One of the active workers who joined the strike after it was legalized states that

“The power of unions has been declined by the AKP government. The first thing for capitalism is to attack the working class. Thus, while a substantial amount of workers were able to go on a strike easily in the past, through privatization, political bans on unionization and attacking to workers, workers are assimilated today” (Bengisu, 34, Istanbul, 26.19.2013).

Most of the active workers refer to the changes by the 1980 coup. As in the case of Petrol-İş, they argue that these changes have affected unionism in a negative way. They agree on the idea with Bengisu that workers are assimilated and dismayed due to political pressures, but not directly pointing out neo-liberal economic and social policies. Due to her older age, Gizem tells her experiences before the 1980s, by saying that

“I remember the days before the 1980s. I remember that workers, doctors, public servants, all people, joined in protests when a right (concerning workers’ right) was withdrawn. I miss those days, because I think workers are needed to be powerful by organizing. Today, the statistics shows that unionization rates are too low in comparison to the past. Today’s workers are beware of losing their jobs since politics suppresses workers through violating human rights and attacking workers’ rights” (Gizem, 48, Istanbul, 26.10.2013).

To this, another member of Hava-İş, Zeynep adds the following:

“People had traumas after the 1980 coup. People who joined in the struggle were imprisoned, murdered or exiled. All people were influenced by these traumas. Consequently, they have been suppressed and a-politicized [...] Today, people are so scared that they worry whether they are penalized just because they join in a public release” (32, Istanbul, 26.10.2013).

As it is seen, these workers underline the political suppression of workers which hardens unionism more than their economic suppression in their explanation of the causes of changes in unionism. Unlike the workers from Petrol-İş, they do not touch upon ideological changes in the political conjuncture of Turkey without referring to the socialist structure of the unions in the past.

Regarding the three workers who did not join the resistance, they confirm what Zeynep tells about the fear they have, which is one of the reasons not to join the strike.

Metin says, for example, that he had two reasons: firstly, not trusting the president of the union, secondly, the fear of getting fired. He argues that “we were afraid, but had reasons for that. The working conditions of the Turkish Airlines are very good; we did not want to lose them. The firings of 305 people scared us very much” (33, Istanbul, 22.11.2013). Concerning their opinions on the changes of unionism, all of them state that they are uncomfortable with unionism today; however, their discomfort is related to the claim that especially Hava-İş does not adopt reconciliatory unionism, without compromising, which leads collective bargaining to have deadlocks. Erdi, for example, states “there are two kinds of unions today. The first one tends to immediately compromise with the employee; the second one leaves the table in the first minute. Both of them are useless” (26, Istanbul, 08.12.2013). Metin, moreover, argues that

“Before, workers were used to get benefits from the state, more. However, at that time, I think the state was exploited. Regarding the Turkish Airlines, there was a perception that *devletin malı deniz, yemeyen keriz*⁶⁴. I do not agree with this. Yes, it is good for workers to have rights, but it is meaningless to become like Greece or Spain through exploiting the state” (33, Istanbul, 22.11.2013).

By stating so, Metin suggests that when workers have ‘too much’ rights, they excessively use resources of the state or the employee, which exploits them. Through supporting reconciliatory and apolitical unionism, Metin, Koral and Erdi do not consider decline of unionism resulting from political pressures, unlike the strikers do.

In terms of the definition of the working class and self-identification with that, this difference between the strikers and non-strikers is also visible. The strikers define the working class mostly as slavery, working with their labor, and fighting for their bread. They agree on the idea that the working class is oppressed by the employee. Bengisu, for example, defines the working class as follows:

“The stance of the working class vis-a-vis the capitalist is slavery. Thus, the capitalist never remunerates with workers. Workers are always oppressed and slaves [...] I think, the majority of the society is workers. Doctors, engineers or teachers are also part of the working class” (34, Istanbul, 26.19.2013).

⁶⁴It is an idiom which means that resources of the state is so endless that people who do not benefit from these are suckers.

This definition of the working class, which includes different jobs that might have higher economic status, is touched upon during the interviews of all strikers. Regardless of being a flight attendant or a technician, all strikers include these jobs as part of the working class, and identify themselves as workers. Moreover, they criticize some of their co-workers who do not consider themselves as workers because of having a high wage. This point is also addressed by the president who defines the working class in accordance with their positions against means of production—in reference to Marxism⁶⁵, while he explains the difficulties of unionizing people in the Turkish Airlines. He suggests that

“People who work in the service sector generally have a sickness of not identifying themselves as workers. Most of pilots and hostesses say that they are not workers. The understanding of the system, the governments and employee keep them away from this identification. In these circumstances, we have difficulties to explain economic and political struggle of the working class to our members” (59, Istanbul, 03.10.2013).

The three non-strikers who work as a flight attendant and marketing experts challenge this argument in a sense, while approving in another sense. All of them agree that the working class has a weaker position against the employee. Erdi and Metin blame unions of being insufficient to strengthen the working class, not defining this weakness based on economy. Both of them connote the working class with mine workers or workers who only work physically. Although they consider themselves as workers, the reason behind that is explained as working too much. Koral, however, grounds weakness of the working class on lack of means of production. While he explains the changes of this definition, he argues that the concept of the working class has taken new meanings, saying “previously, the view of the oppression of the working class was imposed, but today, workers are thought into believing that they are not oppressed through setting small goals for them, such as firstly, buying a house, then a car, etc.” (Koral, 24, Istanbul, 08.12.2013). By arguing so, he refers to being deceived; a critique of the capitalist system. When he is asked how he acquired self-identification with class, he refers to his intellectual development and education.

⁶⁵ In defining the working class, in order to refer to the economic deprivation of workers, he quotes a famous slogan of the Communist Manifesto “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains” (the president of Hava-İş, 59, Istanbul, 03.10.2013).

The strikers' self identifications with the working class mostly depend on their family backgrounds and the union. Gülçin, Gizem and Samet, for example, argue that some of their family members were used to be unionists, which shape their political ideologies. Bengisu also claims that education given by her family helped her to be 'conscious' about the working class and unionism. Zeynep relates her consciousness to her economic class, education and the union. The workers who used to be passive in unionism before the resistance underline the importance of Hava-Iş to raise awareness of identification with the working class. Emre, for example, states that he realized he was a worker after he was fired. "Through learning very much in this process", Emre considers the union as the most effective factor for himself to feel as a member of the working class (27, Istanbul, 24.10.2013). It is obvious that these workers' experiences shape their views on unionism and the working class.

All in all, the definition of unionism and the working class of the members of Hava-Iş is in line with the Marxist ideology, in theory. Regarding the workers, the effects of the resistance on the perception of unionism and the working class are clear-cut. The non-strikers support reconciliatory unionism, unlike the strikers. Workers mostly touch upon political pressures and a-politicization which have led unionism to decline, not addressing economical changes and political ideologies. While the strikers define the working class underlining its oppression, the non-strikers associate workers with working physically. The majority of the strikers claim that their self-identification with the working class is acquired by their family backgrounds and education. The strikers who used to be passive in unionism suggest that the resistance and the union are influential in their self-identification with the working class.

5.2.2. Unionist Identity and Identity Politics

All the strikers and the president of the union agree on the idea that the unionist/class identity is unifying. Very similar to the manager of Petrol-Iş, the president considers class identity broader in comparison to the 'other' identities by stating that

"The class identity is always a unifying identity since it includes different elements; it is broad and collectivist. We saw that in the Tekel Resistance. A

Kurdish and leftist worker from Diyarbakır and a nationalist worker from Trabzon ate together and slept in the same tent” (59, Istanbul, 03.10.2013).

All the strikers also suggest that the unionist identity is a unifying identity since unions are the best means to organize for workers. According to them, when people do the same work, identities do not matter. Bengisu, for example, argues that “the class movements should be one, because being together brings success. People say that I am a Laz, but I listen to the Kurdish music. Any language, race or preferences cannot have a chance to divide us” (34, Istanbul, 26.10.2013). In this direction, they support organization based on identities under the condition of being exposed to suppression. Emre, for example, argues that “all kinds of organizations are good, if they are organized against injustice” (27, Istanbul, 24.10.2013). Similarly, Zeynep looks towards identity politics empathically, suggesting that

“People were suffered and suppressed so much that they chose to organize [...] After I listened to their stories and looked from their perspectives, I think that I would also organize if the same things happened to me [...] If they are against their suppression and exploitation, I support them” (Zeynep, 32, Istanbul, 26.10.2013).

When his views on identity politics are asked, the president does not touch upon ethnic differences, but denominational and ideological differences among the members of Hava-İş. He suggests that these differences cause divisions among workers, leading class identity to be weakened. As another critique of the AKP government, the president claims that people working in the Turkish Airlines are divided as the partisans of the AKP and the others. According to him, none of the AKP partisans joined the resistance, as “in our work line, we cannot make people from *the Cemaat*⁶⁶ go on the strike. We could not organize those who look at the issue from this perspective” (59, Bakırkoy, 03.10.2013).

In response to the question whether identity politics harms unionism, the answer of many strikers is negative. The Kurdish worker, Sinem, for example, touches upon the necessity of different identities in the unionist movement for a democratic environment, stating that “I like differences, because you see that democracy and freedom exist there.

⁶⁶ The president refers to *Gülen Cemaati* which is a religious and social movement, but known as influential in the recent politics of Turkey.

Homosexuals should be able to express themselves easily. In such an environment, I feel more comfortable” (28, Istanbul, 24.10.2013). Another Kurdish worker, Fatih claims that Hava-Iş embraces everybody; Kurds, Alevis and women. Samet confirms this claim, by saying that “for instance, a friend in this tent is from Samsun. He is an *Alperen*⁶⁷. I am Kurdish, but we get along well” (36, Istanbul, 26.10.2013). However, some strikers argue that the differences of political ideologies sometimes cause divisions in the union. Gülçin, for example, points out some disagreements among strikers, arguing that

“After the strike began, some political groups and unions visited us. I was not interested in their political views; but their support was important to me. For some reason, it bothered some people who argued that the strike was not political. However, you see that the company is supported by the government; thus, the strike is political in addition to struggling for rights” (36, Istanbul, 24.10.2013)

It is claimed by Gülçin that political nature of the strike and visits of some political groups to the strikers disturbed some non-strikers. Metin, for example, argues that “TIKKO⁶⁸ came to the field of strike, which rebels against the state by firing gun or bombing molotoves. What are they doing there? [...] We were opposed to the visit of the BDP, as well. The president of the union attracted antipathy by welcoming these kinds of groups” (33, Istanbul, 22.11.2013). Metin does not directly criticize politicization of the strike; however, he wants politicization to be limited, excluding ‘the rebellions’. His argument on identity politics is along the similar lines. While he demonstrates that he supports democratization, he argues that identity politics should remain in the limits of Turkish traditions; otherwise, different identities damage the working class. Hence, he states that “there are people whose sexual preferences are unknown to the Turkish Airlines. We cannot approve them” (Metin, 33, Istanbul, 22.11.2013). Referring to the homosexuals, Metin does not have an emphatic attitude towards different identities, and does not consider the unionist identity unifying due to the political nature of Hava-Iş. The other non-strikers’ opinion on unionist identity is similar with that of Metin. Erdi and Koral also think that different political ideologies

⁶⁷ *Alperen Ocakları* is a youth organization which is known as Turkish nationalist and Islamist.

⁶⁸ The armed wing of the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist.

prevent people from feeling a belonging to the union. Different from Metin, they support identity politics if people need them due to their suppression. However, unlike the strikers, they evaluate identity politics and unionism separately, without touching upon the interaction between them. For example, Koral says that

“I think they are completely independent from each other. Workers have the chance to change their job, but identities based on ethnicities cannot be changed. I think togetherness of the working class is weaker than the identity based organizations. Because of that, workers who have different identities can oppose each other in a union; because unionist identity is not so powerful” (24, Istanbul, 08.12.2013).

Thus, the three non-strikers do not consider unionist identity as unifying due to two reasons: First, they claim that identities based on ethnicity, religion or sexuality tend to cause divisions among unionists, since the unionist identity is weaker than the other identities to unify workers on the basis of class struggle. The reasons of this weakness are linked to the failure of the unions. The second argument is that different political ideologies have a factious nature, damaging the union’s ‘reputation’. On the contrary, the strikers think that the unionist identity has the power to include all different identities, uniting on the basis of the working class struggle without suppressing them. Although the strikers agree on this argument, it is clear that some disagreements on different political ideologies among the members of Hava-Iş came to light during the strike.

5.2.3. The Kurdish Question and Everyday Practices of Kurds

In the General Meetings of Hava-Iş, the Kurdish question does not specifically find a place, unlike those of Petrol-Iş. Hence, the interviews will be the only data for the analysis of the Kurdish question.

The president of the union starts his speech about the Kurdish question through underlining his personal experiences as a Kurdish unionist. He states that

“In 1989, I said that there was a Kurdish question which was an obstacle for democratization and liberation of this country; the state put me in jail. I said that this state would eventually bargain with Apo; the state put me in jail. I said that nations should have decided their future with their own will; I was imprisoned for 19 months” (the president of the union, 59, Istanbul, 03.10.2013).

In those years, his imprisonment was inevitable while the state denied the Kurdish question or even Kurds' existence as an ethnic group. For this reason, the president's views on the Kurdish question referring to the concept of 'self-determination of nations' of Leninism can be interpreted as significant for the nature and resolution of the issue. He maintains his arguments today through suggesting that the Kurdish question is the primary question of Turkey, which should be resolved by the participation of all parties of the question. He argues that one of the parties should be the unions, since workers can only use their rights in an environment where equal opportunities are provided by the state. By suggesting so, the president refers to the economic and cultural suppression of Kurds, beginning with the foundation of the Republic. He, moreover, touches upon the support of Kurds to the resistance by stating that

“We always say that the Kurdish question intertwines with the unionist movement. When we look at the people who came here to support the resistance, they were mostly Kurds. We see that their sensibility towards the national question is intertwined with the class problems. They are able to correlate these two, but aware of prioritizing the class identity”⁶⁹ (the president of the union, 59, Istanbul, 03.10.2013)

His underlining interaction between the class movements and the Kurdish question signals that he supports multiple subjectivities in class. In terms of personal identities, however, as a Kurdish unionist, he prefers to prioritize the class identity.

Most of the strikers agree with the president on the Kurdish question. The general view of the strikers who have different ethnic backgrounds and economic status is that Kurds have been deliberately deprived of the economic and cultural rights. A flight attendant who defines herself as an atheist, feminist and anarchist, for example, touches upon the right to self-determination of Kurds, like the president, states that

“Kurds are struggling to survive. They were killed only because of being Kurdish. There are a lot of painful stories. In the forums (organized by the strikers), I met *Cumartesi Anneleri*⁷⁰ and the people who were forcibly

⁶⁹ He explains the differences in unionism in the East and the West, grounding on the same reasons that “people from the East are more sensible to the problems of the country. They can draw a parallelism between national and class questions” (the president of the union, 59, Istanbul, 03.10.2013)

⁷⁰ *Cumartesi Anneleri* is a community which is composed of relatives of people who were lost in costudies or murdered by unknown assailants.

migrated. I realized that we did not know anything about these. I support Kurds to live in the ways they like and their right to self determination. However, I do not care about borders; hence, I prefer to live together. They should be able to develop their culture. It is richness. I want to be together, but they should decide that, because they have been always told what to do. They have been looked down; considered as imperialist henchmen and ignorant. This is very bad” (Zeynep, 32, Istanbul, 26.10.2013).

Zeynep, pointing right to self-determination, acknowledges the suppression of Kurds. Moreover, she underlines that organizing forums by the strikers of Hava-İş in which various organizations involve, makes her be aware of the painful experiences of Kurds.

None of the strikers consider the Kurdish question as a mere economic problem; however, they agree on the point that Kurds have been economically suppressed, in addition to the cultural suppression. The Kurdish worker Fatih, for example, states that

“The Kurdish question dates back to the foundation of the Turkish Republic. Some say that it is economic; some say that it is political; others say that it is a national problem. All of these came together, and created the Kurdish question [...] The state has not invested in the East. In addition, terrorist incidents and the attacks of the army made people migrate to the West” (36, Istanbul, 24.10.2013).

Labeling the PKK as a terrorist group, Fatih is not the only striker who touches upon the distinction between the PKK and the other Kurdish people who do not support the PKK. Although Gülçin underlines the economic and cultural deprivation of Kurds, she also makes a distinction between the PKK and the demands of Kurds, disregarding their interrelatedness. She argues that “I was grown up with Kurdish neighbors in Malatya. I do not have personal problems with them. However, I dislike the PKK. I am opposed to the foundation of the independent Kurdistan within our territories. We should live together, sisterly” (Gülçin, 36, Istanbul, 24.10.2013). Relating her peaceful sentiments to Kurds with her childhood experiences, she does not have a discriminative attitude towards them; however, she makes a distinction between Kurds and the PKK. Similarly, another striker Gizem underlines *Misak-ı Milli Sınırları*⁷¹, supporting living together. Defining ethnic identities as sub-identities, she states that

⁷¹ The borders of Turkey which was defined in 1920 by the last term of the Ottoman Parliament.

“This question is not only due to the economical reasons. The state denied and humiliated them [...] For instance, everybody is obsessed with Kurdish education. I do not understand why. I studied in a French school [...] I highlight that the mother tongue of the Turkish Republic is Turkish, but why do not they learn Kurdish in the schools? There is no problem when children learn German, Italian or French. Where is democracy? Where is equality?” (Gizem, 48, Istanbul, 26.10.2013).

Although Gizem supports the integrity of the Turkish nation-state, this view does not prevent her from being emphatic to the cultural demands of Kurds.

Only one of the strikers, Emre, who used to be passive in unionism before, does not present an opinion on the causes and results of the Kurdish question, stating that “I cannot say useful things for you since I do not have an intellectual background on this issue” (27, Istanbul, 24.10.2013). However, when his opinions on every day practices of Kurds in the working place and the union are asked, he claims that he has no problems with the Kurdish language, opposing discriminative reactions to Kurds. Thus, it can be claimed that there is homogeneity among the strikers concerning the views on the Kurdish question, regardless of their ethnicities and socio-economic statuses.

It is, however, not the case for the non-strikers. It is difficult to refer to the homogeneity among the non-strikers; nevertheless, the common point they share is that their empathy towards the demands of Kurds is limited. Koral, for example, argues that

“It is unpleasant to call it the Kurdish question. It has been caused by wrong policies which otherized Kurds. I think that they can speak Kurdish, take Kurdish education or broadcast in the state television. They are not a problem for me. It creates a problem when a terrorist joins the guerilla⁷², he/she is a traitor” (Koral, 24, Istanbul, 08.12.2013).

He, moreover, keeps his ‘tolerance’ for speaking Kurdish or listening to the Kurdish music in the working place as long as “these practices do not aim political propaganda to provoke people” (Koral, 24, Istanbul, 08.12.2013). Hence, Koral opposes the politicization of the Kurdish identity, which limits his empathy. While Koral defines the causes of the issue as social otherization, the other non-striker, Metin tends to reduce the problem to having economic deprivation which has been caused by ‘terror’. He argues that

⁷² The exact saying is *dağa çıkmak*.

“We are Kurdish, but we support different views. As a Kurdish citizen, I never want them to fight against the state [...] In fact, as a Kurd; I do not think that Kurds are oppressed. It was put forward to divide the country. There is no Kurdish question [...] They made it a problem through creating a state of terror for 30 years, which prevents people and the state from making investments [...] Children were grown up as ignorant in that region. They are given molotoves; all these harm the state. People are deceived [...] Everyone should live within the borders of Turkey. In our identity cards, ‘Turkish’ should be written” (Metin, 33, Istanbul, 22.11.2013).

As it is observed, Metin considers the causes of the problem as the Kurdish movement. He argues that ignorance and economic underdevelopment of the region—caused by the Kurdish movement—have created this problem. In terms of the cultural demands of Kurds, he states “unfortunately, the Kurdish language should be taught, because we cannot communicate (with people who do not know Turkish)” (Metin, 33, Istanbul, 22.11.2013). He links this ‘unfortunate’ to not understanding his grandmother, who does not speak Turkish due to the lack of education facilities in the region. Hence, he does not identify Kurds as suppressed, having a discriminative attitude towards people who join the Kurdish movement, while he does not have problems with the use of Kurdish language in public.

The third non-striker, Erdi who labels himself as apolitical does not touch upon the Kurdish movement. He distinguishes the demands of the Kurdish people into two: Firstly, he argues that the causes of the problem are primarily based on the economics for the poor segment of Kurds. According to him, economic underdevelopment of the region has led Kurds to be deprived of state services and industrial investments, such as education. He states that “except education, there is a huge gap even in terms of internet access. If a house in Diyarbakır had internet access as much as I had, we would not be at this point” (Erdi, 26, Istanbul, 08.12.2013). By suggesting so, Erdi refers to the ignorance of the Kurdish poor caused by lack of education as if this ignorance led them to disregard their cultural rights, but emphasizing their own economic deprivation as the primary cause of the question. Thus, he evaluates the causes of internal migration as economic. Secondly, he suggests that the Kurdish middle class has cultural demands, such as use of language, stating that “they might feel a longing to name their children as *Rojin*⁷³” (Erdi, 26, Istanbul, 08.12.2013). However, he argues that this question comes to

⁷³ A Kurdish name.

an end when all Kurds be able to have equal economic opportunities—which the Kurdish middle class already has, arguing that

“A generation who benefits from good opportunities is needed to be grown up. Hence, 20 or 30 years should pass. Think of a Kurdish child whose both parents have a job. This kid will get education in a better school; he/she will have internet access; he/she will hang out with his/her boyfriend/girlfriend, then this problem will end” (Erdi, 26, Istanbul, 08.12.2013).

As seen, Erdi links the resolution of the problem with the rise of welfare among Kurds. Although this view ignores the political and cultural sides of the issue, Erdi, as a non-striker, does not have a discriminative discourse towards Kurds.

Regarding everyday practices of Kurds in the union, all strikers and non-strikers argue that there is no discrimination against Kurds. In the working places, however, some Kurdish strikers, such as Sinem and Fatih claim that they sometimes feel ‘disfavored’ when they talk about their ethnic origin. The Turkish strikers, on the other hand, suggest that they, personally, do not have problems with the use of the Kurdish language. So do the non-strikers; however, they sometimes limit their ‘tolerance’ as it is discussed. Although all of them agree that there is no discrimination, some of the strikers claim that the Kurdish workers sometimes hesitate from introducing themselves as Kurds. Bengisu, for example, argues that “there are Kurds here, but they do not reveal their identities. I have a friend who says recently that he is from Tunceli. They keep it as a secret” (34, Istanbul, 26.10.2013). However, many strikers claim that Kurds are more comfortable in the union with their Kurdish ethnic identities. They attribute this to the unions’ being leftist or intellectual. Concerning some disagreements on the visits of some political organizations during the strike, Bengisu admits that they experience some reactions to the Kurdish political organizations in the forums, but she claims that the leftists do not react to them. The Kurdish striker, Samet, for example, shares an experience he had during the resistance, which confirms these kinds of reactions. He argues that while they were dancing *halay*, someone said “*Allah’ın şemmesiyile halay mı çekiyorsunuz?*”⁷⁴ After a discussion, Samet claims that the

⁷⁴ Halay is a traditional Kurdish dance which is popularly performed accompanied by the Kurdish song, Şemname. The person who says that “Allah’ın şemmesiyile halay mı çekiyorsunuz?”, has humiliating discourse towards the dance and the song.

person who reacted to the traditional dance in a humiliating way was persuaded with what Samet told. Samet also thinks that the majority of the strikers in the field of the strike do not think like in that way, since they are intellectuals, linking empathy towards the Kurdish movement/Kurd's oppression to higher level of education.

These kinds of reactions are confirmed by the president of the union, as well. It was reported in the news⁷⁵ that during the strike, the visit of a deputy of the BDP, Sebahat Tuncel was rejected by the managers of Hava-Iş. When it is asked to the president the reasons behind it, he claims that there were some strikers who did not want him to visit the field of the strike. He, however, argues that these strikers were provoked by the employee to damage the strike; because he says that there was no any negative reaction to Sebahat Tuncel, when she came before. Since he could not risk losing these workers, he argues that he was obliged to delay the visit. Although none of the strikers interviewed opposed to the visit of the BDP, two of the non-strikers confirm this opposition. Defining the BDP's partisans as ignorant Kurds, Erdi's negative reaction to its visit is touched on. In addition to Erdi, Koral also states

“In the march on the Istiklal Street, there were people from the union who were holding Apo posters and BDP flags. I do not want to be under the same roof with these people who let this discrimination and make the union an instrument for their political aims; because; they do not defend my rights, but their political interests” (24, Istanbul, 08.12.2013).

Hence, politicization of the Kurdish movement disturbs the two of the non-strikers, Metin and Koral, while most of the strikers do not oppose the Kurdish movement. Although the two of the strikers, Gülçin and Gizem underline their preference to live within the same territories with Kurds, all of the strikers do not have discriminative discourse against Kurds and the Kurdish movement, defining the question grounding on the suppression of Kurds. As it is analyzed, their common point is the strike which helps them to identify themselves as the members of the class struggle. Their jobs—white collar or blue collar; education levels or ethnic backgrounds do not affect their views on the Kurdish question. In the analysis of the non-strikers, it is harder to find homogeneity among them in terms of the topics that are covered. However, they agree on the idea

⁷⁵ Odatv, May, 22, 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.odatv.com/n.php?n=bdp-isci-sinifina-neden-kizdi-2205131200>

that unionism is weak to organize the working class who are defined without reference to classical approach on the working class. Although their views on the Kurdish question do not include ethnic-based discrimination, their empathy is limited, without emphasizing the suppression of Kurds.

All in all, the members and the president of Hava-Iş define unionism and the working class very much in line with the Marxist doctrine. Similarly with the president, the strikers underline the cause of changes in unionism and the working class as political pressure beginning with the 1980 coup and increased by the AKP government. Some of the strikers suggest that the union and the resistance help them to acknowledge their class positions; while the other strikers argue that self-identification with the working class is acquired by education and family backgrounds. The non-strikers do not define the working class emphasizing its oppression, and consider unionism as beneficial. It is due to the fact that the non-strikers do not perceive the class identity as powerful enough to organize workers, while the strikers suggest that the unionist identity is unifying. In terms of their views on identity politics, the president and the strikers argue that different identities are included in the unionist movement; however, they underline that political divisions—the AKP versus the opposing—harm the class movement rather than ethnic differences. Politicization of these ethnic differences generally does not disturb the strikers, while the non-strikers are uncomfortable with some political parties. This discomfort for the non-strikers is observable during the strike which is also supported by the BDP members. Regarding the Kurdish question, the strikers underline the oppression of Kurds, making a link between the oppression of the working class. As for the non-strikers, they mostly define the Kurdish question grounding on Kurds' economic deprivation, having a limited empathy towards their demands, without underlining their oppression. Thus, it can be claimed that the strikers who have class perspectives are more capable of having an emphatic attitude towards Kurds than the non-strikers whose class identity is absent.

5.3. The Comparison between Petrol-Iş and Hava-Iş

Petrol-Iş and Hava-Iş have very similar definitions on unionism and the working class as the interviews with their managers show. Both of them consider unionism as

‘class and mass unionism’ which supports economic and political struggle of the working class, as opposed to yellow unionism. They define the working class with reference to the Marxist ideology, on the contrary to the perception which divides the working class in accordance with their jobs or social status. Regarding the changes on unionism and the definition of the working class, the managers underline neoliberal economic policies, such as subcontracting and cheap labor, and political pressures, while the president of Hava-Iş emphasizes the AKP government’s oppressive policies towards unions and the working class, more. Despite their different ethnic backgrounds, both managers perceive the unionist identity is broader or more important than other identities; however, they do not tend to suppress identities in class and identity movements. Both of them underline the economic and cultural sides of the Kurdish question, supporting peaceful resolution of the question.

The opinions of the Petrol-Iş and Hava-Iş workers, however, are different in ‘class’ sense. The strike of Hava-Iş has a determining role in this difference. While the interviewees from Hava-Iş who join the strike have more common points on the topics discussed, Petrol-Iş workers’ answers mostly depend on their individual characteristics which are shaped by their experiences, family backgrounds or political ideologies. Workers in Petrol-Iş who have leftist political backgrounds underline the necessity of politicization of the unionist movement while they develop emphatic attitude towards Kurds and the Kurdish movement, defining the Kurdish question as an economic, political and social problem. The other workers—not defining themselves as political, but being active in unionism—define the working class as suppressed; however, they do not consider Kurds are suppressed or define the Kurdish question as a mere economic problem. A Kurdish worker who identifies himself as having class consciousness is also included in this segment. Moreover, the workers who do not define the working class by emphasizing their suppression have also discriminative discourse towards Kurds’ every day practices and the Kurdish movement. Hence, being a Kurdish or being active in unionism—defining the working class with reference to Marxism—might not help workers to look at the Kurdish movement and Kurds’ every day practices from an emphatic perspective. Moreover, it is seen that the nature of Petrol-Iş—in terms of its views on unionism and the Kurdish question—might not be sufficient to make workers being emphatic to Kurds’ suppression, since workers’ political ideologies which have

the working class perspective are more influential for their views on the Kurdish question as a whole.

It is not the case for the strikers of Hava-Iş. Their experiences with the strike have a powerful effect on their definition of the working class, unifying nature of unionism, and self-identification with the working class. All these tend to influence their views on the suppression of Kurds. Their ethnic origins, socio-economic status and education levels do not make a difference on their views, since all of them tend to prioritize their class identities. They make a link between the suppression of Kurds and suppression of the working class. All of them develop empathy towards the suppression of Kurds. The ones who acknowledge the political nature of their strike do not have a discriminative point of view against the Kurdish movement although they do not personally support it. The non-strikers, however, have difficulties to define the working class from the classical Marxist point of view, identifying the working class with working physically. Accordingly, they do not consider unionism as beneficial. Although some of them consider identity movements as necessary, their definition of the Kurdish question and empathy towards the suppression of Kurds are limited, opposing politicization of the Kurdish identity. Therefore, while Hava-Iş workers whose class identities are prioritized are more emphatic to the suppression of Kurds, Petrol-Iş workers' empathy is more associated with their political ideologies, which has a class consciousness.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

The Kurdish question has been one of the hot topics of Turkey, for years, having substantial effects on political, social and economic arenas, which affects its popularity in the academic realm. In parallel with the political conjuncture, the Kurdish question has been discussed through various approaches, focusing on its ethnic, class or security dimensions. On the other hand, trade unions' popularity—along with class' popularity—has not always been at the same level in the academic discussions. In fact, discussion of class—having the concept/practice of trade unions—has included discussion of the Kurdish question, beginning in the 1960s. Although this class and the Kurdish question interaction have been blurred over time, the discussion of the Kurdish question from a class based perspective still exists today. Therefore, in this study, we wanted to understand how this interaction between class and ethnicity finds a place in the trade unions, aiming to answer *whether class interacts with other forms of suppression, or not.*

According to the classical approach on class, ethnic identities should not be emphasized, since the most important dimension in social stratification is between the oppressed and the oppressor in the economic sense. As Mullen says for the working class “you have nothing but your identities” (2012, p.41), other identities are considered as factious for the unity of the working class. Accordingly, in our study, some members of the unions have an antipathetical discourse towards Kurds' demands or the Kurdish movement, as in the case of some Petrol-İş workers who play active roles in unionism, but opposing the Kurdish activism. At that point, it is important to clear out the distinction between the forms of suppression in class. For the classical Marxist theory, this suppression—undermining the other identities—should take place for the sake of the class struggle in which the class identity is the prominent one. However, in our study, it is seen that nationalistic sentiments are determining for the discriminative discourse towards the Kurdish movement, rather than the idea that the identity movements distract the class movements. While the classical approach on class is closer to the claim that the identity movements, taking all attention, might distract the importance of class as a variable and the class movements, the nationalistic stance, which leads the demands of Kurds to be ignored, is not very compatible with the

classical Marxism in theory. Thus, although the workers who have discriminative attitudes towards the demands of Kurds touch upon the Marxist doctrine in explaining the working class, they oppose the Kurdish movement because of their nationalistic sentiments, which is not an argument of the classical Marxism.

All approaches on class do not argue that the class identity should suppress other identities, but it includes multiple subjectivities which are shaped by itself through interaction with other processes (Wright, 1996). In the process of political socialization, the workers of Petrol-İş and Hava-İş are different in the 'class' sense. Although all workers from Petrol-İş are blue-collar workers who are perceived as 'more proletarian' than white-collar workers, some of them do not define themselves as workers. In the case of Hava-İş, on the contrary, the workers' being white-collar workers do not prevent them from considering themselves as part of the working class. Thus, the study shows that socialization with the strike and the union is the determining factor for the Hava-İş workers for self-identification with the working class. It is seen that Hava-İş workers who joined the resistance not only gained a class identity, but also an empathic perspective to the other social problems, such as the Kurdish question. Regarding the Petrol-İş workers, social processes that are individually experienced have become more influential for linking the suppression of Kurds to the suppression of the working class. As Gibson-Graham et al. (2000) state that class processes are enacted in multiple forms: the capitalist (economic) and non-capitalist (individual) ones, the workers' economic suppression is perceived by themselves through their individual characteristics. Hence, socialization with class has been affected mostly by their political ideologies (Wright, 1996) and past injuries (Özselçuk, 2006). In other words, this socialization, includes politicization and individual experiences in the case of the Petrol-İş workers, while the Hava-İş strikers are socialized and politicized more through the strike which is not only an individual experience, but also a unifying one with the class identity created by the union. In general, the workers whose ideologies are grounded on class, and the workers who personally experience oppression of being a worker and a Kurd are able to make a connection between two kinds of oppression: class and ethnicity.

In the analysis of the interviews, it is also observed that solely being a Kurdish worker does not necessarily provide the workers with an understanding of all kinds of

oppression. A Kurdish worker might not consider being a Kurd as a form of suppression although he emphasizes the oppression of the working class; or, he/she might not acknowledge both kinds of oppression. Regarding the nature of identity movements, which links the ability of understanding oppression with being personally experienced, the study shows that it is not always the case. While a Kurdish worker does not define Kurds as suppressed, another worker, regardless of being Kurdish or Turkish, can support all kinds of movements, including identity or class based ones, if these movements fight against different forms of suppression. At that point, as it is explained above, individual or collective politicization becomes determining. However, it is important to note that this politicization is in line with the socialist ideology which has a working class perspective. The workers from both unions who develop empathy towards the Kurdish movement are active in the unionist movement. Thus, these workers' position is in line with the era of the 1960s-1970s when the class struggle and the Kurdish movement were discussed together. Although the workers do not point out this togetherness in this era, some of them underline the intersection of both kinds of oppression.

Namely, it can be concluded that the working class identity, directly or indirectly, helps to create a link with other forms of oppression. This conclusion confirms the argument of multiple subjectivities in class. Gibson-Graham (2000) suggests that each identity—class and ethnic based—can be understood as the complex processes, none of which should be considered as having a fundamental importance alone. While some of the workers agree with this point, both managers of the unions subject to this research tend to prioritize the class identity. However, it does not necessitate supporting the argument of suppression of identities in class. It is due to the fact that the managers do not claim that different identities or identity movements—separate from class movements—distract the unionist struggle. On the contrary, they support the discussion of the Kurdish question in the unions, being a part of the resolution process. Moreover, they oppose nationalistic attitudes which lead Kurds to be discriminated. Therefore, although the arguments of both the managers are closer to the classical approach on class, prioritizing the class identity, they are supportive for the claim of multiple subjectivities in class. It is observable among the Kurdish workers from both unions. Although prioritization of class identity might lead alienation of

Kurds from the unionist movement, as Benlisoy (2012) argues, it is not the case for the Kurdish workers of Petrol-Iş and Hava-Iş. Besides, it is stated by some workers that Kurdish workers are more enthusiastic to be active in unionism. The reasons behind that can be explained by two arguments: First, the two forms of suppression—being a Kurd and being a worker—are connoted in the perception of these people. Secondly, the class identity is unifying enough to embrace the Kurdish workers, without alienating them through prioritization itself. Hence, class might not distract the other identities.

The factors that are considered as weakening class are also asked to the workers. Many workers from each union list these factors as, changes in the structure of work (white or blue-collar) (Pakulski & Waters, 1996), rising affluence (Clark & Lipset, 1991), and mass education (Melluci, 1989). Although they think that all these factors have affected unionism to be weakened—in addition to the effects of economic and political pressures by the neoliberal understanding—most workers do not consider the working class as invalid but one that is ignored. This ignorance—caused deliberately by the capitalist system—is criticized by the active workers in unionism. Moreover, especially as in the case of Hava-Iş, it is seen that different occupations, socio-economic status and education levels of workers are not influential in self-identification with the working class and their views on the Kurdish question. Thus, it is observed that the factors given by the scholars (Pakulski & Waters, 1996; Clark & Lipset, 1991; Melluci, 1989) are influential for class/unionism to be disregarded, but not sufficient for the discussion of ‘death of class’.

When every day practices of Kurds in the working places are analyzed, it is unfortunately seen that discrimination against Kurds continues. Although empathic workers to the demands of Kurds support cultural practices, most workers suggest that Kurds who prioritize their ethnic identities or speak Kurdish in public can be exposed to discriminative reactions. The workers mostly relate this discrimination to the political conjuncture of Turkey; however, insufficiency of the unions in promoting ideological/theoretical knowledge to their members are also observable, when active but ‘non-emphatic’ workers are considered.

All in all, theoretical divisions of the left—suppressing identities versus multiple subjectivities in class—are practically visible in the leftist ideologies of Turkey, today.

Although the majority of the active workers from Petrol-Iş and Hava-Iş who are subjects of this research does not support the suppression of the Kurdish identity, existence of workers who support suppression of the Kurdish identity should not be disregarded. Hence, the unions should ‘speak Kurdish’ more through involving in the discussion of the Kurdish question and promoting awareness among their members.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

For the workers

Genel

1. Sendikaya kaç yılında, hangi amaçla üye oldunuz?
2. Sendikal çalışmalarda aktif rol oynuyor musunuz? Oynadıysanız, ne tür çalışmalar yapıyorsunuz? Sizce bu çalışmaların ne gibi yararları var?
3. Dünden bugüne sendikal harekette bir değişim görüyor musunuz, varsa nelerdir?

Sınıf

4. İşçi sınıfı deyince aklınıza neler geliyor? Sermaye karşısında nasıl bir duruşu vardır? (Bunların dün/bugün farkı var mı?)
 - Kendinizi bu sınıfa mensup olarak görüyor musunuz?
 - Görüyorsanız, bu bilinci oluşturmada neler etkili oldu? (Ekonomik, sosyal durum ve sendikal hareket)
5. Sizce sendikal hareket işçi sınıfını birleştiren bir hareket midir?
6. İşçi sınıfı ve sendikal hareket haricinde, kimlik bazlı (etnik, dinsel, cinsel) örgütlenmeler hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?
 - İşçi sınıfındaki farklı kimlikler (etnik, dinsel, cinsel) sendikal harekete/sınıf mücadelesine tehlike yaratır mı?

Kürt Meselesi

7. Kürt meselesi hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? (Nedenleri, sonuçları?)
 - İç göçün bu sorunda yeri var mı? Varsa, bu işçileri ve sendikalaşmayı nasıl etkiledi?
 - Sendikada ve iş yerinizde farklı kimliklerden işçilerle (Kürt x Türk) sorun yaşıyor musunuz? Ya da buna tanık oluyor musunuz?
 - Kürt ve Türk işçiler arasında bir gruplaşma/ayrışma seziyor musunuz? Varsa, nedenleri nelerdir? Yoksa, sizleri ortaklaştıran nelerdir?

Kürt ise; İş yerinizde ve sendikada anadilinizde konuşmanız nasıl karşılanıyor?

Kendinizi Krt kimlięinizle tanittięınızda sorun yaşıyor musunuz?
Trk ise; Krt iřçilerin Krtçe konuřması ya da Krtçe yayın okuması, mzik dinlemesi hakkında ne dřnyorsunuz?

Krt kimlięini n plana ıkaran iřçiler hakkında ne dřnyorsunuz?

For the managers

Genel

1. Sendikanız kaç yılında ne amaçla kuruldu?
2. Üye profiliniz (yaş, cinsiyet, eğitim durumu, gelir düzeyi), (aralarındaki farklar)
 - Üyelik kıstaslarınız nelerdir?
 - Hangi illerde ve hangi iş kollarında üyeleriniz var?
 - Farklı meslek grupları sendikanıza üye olabiliyorlar mı? Sizce bu grupları ortaklaştıran ya da ayırıştırıcı etkenler var mı?
3. Kuruluş tarihinden itibaren günümüze kadar olan bir değişim (misyon ve üye profili bazında) var mı, varsa nasıl açıklarsınız?

Sınıf

4. Sendikanız İşçi sınıfını nasıl tanımlıyor?
 - Bu tanım kuruluştan itibaren değişim gösterdi mi?
 - (Eğer gösterdiyse bu değişimin nedenlerini nasıl açıklarsınız?)
 - Bu değişimlerin arasında Orta sınıfın yükselmesini, eğitim düzeyinin artmasını, refah devletinin yükselmesini gösterebilir misiniz?
5. İşçi sınıfı kimliği (sınıf bilinci) oluşturmada sendikanın bir rolü var mıdır?, Varsa bu aşamada sendikanız nasıl roller üstleniyor?
 - Bu kimlik birleştirici / homojen bir kimlik midir?
6. Sendikanızın kimlik politikaları (etnik, dinsel, cinsel kimlikler) hakkındaki görüşü nedir?
 - Farklı kimlikler sınıf bilinci ya da sınıf mücadelesi için bir tehlike yaratır mı?
 - Sendikanızda farklı kimliklerden üyeler bulunmakta mıdır?

Kürt Meselesi

7. Kürt Meselesi'ni nasıl tanımlarsınız?
 - Bölgesel ekonomik eşitsizliklerin bu sorunda yeri nedir?
 - Kürt etnik kimliğinin bu sorunda yeri nedir?

- İ gcn (kırsaldan sanayi blgelerine) bu sorunda yeri nedir?
i.e. gcle gelen iŖcilerin dięer iŖcilerle iliŖkileri nasıldır?
- Bu durumlar (ekonomiik eŖsitsizlik, etnik kimlik ve i gc) iŖci mcadelesini nasıl etkiler?

8. Krt Meselesi ile ilgili alıŖmalarınız var mı?

- Varsa, bu alıŖmalarda baŖka sendikalarla ya da STK'larla iŖ birlięi iinde buldunuz mu?
- Sendikal hareketin doęu-batı farklılıkları var mı? Nasıl?

APPENDIX B

Görüşme Protokol Formu



Sanat ve Sosyal Bilimler Fakültesi

Avrupa Çalışmaları Master Programı

Master Tezi Araştırması: Sınıf ve Etnisite Bağdaşımı: Türkiye’de Sendikalar ve Kürt Meselesi

Görüşme Protokolü

Tarih:

Görüşme yapılan kişi:

Görüşmeyi yapan kişi: Hazal Altunkulp, Sabancı Üniversitesi Avrupa Çalışmaları Master öğrencisi

Kısımlar:

1. Sendika hakkında genel bilgiler
2. Sınıf
3. Kürt Meselesi

Röportaj sonrası yorumlar ve gözlemler: _____

Tanıtıcı Protokol

Not almayı kolaylaştırmak için, görüşmemizi kayıt altına almayı rica ediyorum. Bu kayıt sadece benim tarafımdan dinlenebilecek ve analizden sonra silinecek. Verdiğiniz tüm bilgiler gizli kalacak. Gönüllü katılımınızı kendinizi rahatsız hissettiğiniz zaman durdurabilirsiniz. Bu görüşme size zarar vermeyecek.

Röportajın yaklaşık 30 dakika süreceğini tahmin ediyorum. Eğer zamanımız soruları cevaplamaya yetmezse sizi durdurup başka sorular sorabilirim.

Giriş

Sizinle sendika üyesi olarak görüşüyorum. Bu araştırma genel olarak sınıf ve etnise bağdaşımını sorgulayarak, Türk sendikalarının Kürt Meselesi'ne bakış açısını analiz etmeyi amaçlıyor. Bu doğrultuda, araştırmamın iki merceği bulunuyor. Birincisi, sendikanızın işçi sınıfı olgusuna nasıl baktığıdır. İkincisi ise, Kürt Meselesi'ni nasıl yorumladığınızdır. Bu bağlamda sınıf ve etnisitenin bir ilişkisi olup olmadığını öğrenmeyi amaçlıyorum. Çalışmamda bilgi düzeyinizi ölçmeyi asla amaçlamıyorum. Araştırma konum hakkında, sadece neler düşündüğünüzü ve neler deneyimlediğinizi öğrenmek çalışmam için çok değerli olacaktır. Katılımınız için teşekkür ederim.

Görüşmeci Hakkında Ön Bilgiler

Yaş:

Etnisite:

Eğitim Durumu:

APPENDIX C

The Personal Backgrounds of Interviewees

1. Petrol-İş

| NAME | EDUCATION | ETHNICITY | JOB | AGE |
|--------------------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|-----|
| The manager of the union | High school | Turkish | The manager (a former worker) | 53 |
| Ali | University | Turkish (Alevi) | Worker (the union representative) | 44 |
| Salih | High school | Turkish | Worker | 40 |
| Uğur | High school | Turkish | Worker (the union representative) | 33 |
| Murat | University | Turkish | Worker | 33 |
| Şeyhmus | University | Kurdish (Alevi) | Worker | 30 |
| Osman | High school | Turkish | Worker | 38 |
| Hasan | High school | Kurdish | Security officer | 40 |
| Cüneyt | High School | Kurdish | Worker | 43 |

2. Hava-İş

| NAME | EDUCATION | ETHNICITY | JOB | AGE |
|----------------------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----|
| The president of the union | High school | Kurdish (Alevi) | The president (a former worker) | 59 |
| Sinem* | University | Kurdish | Flight attendant | 28 |
| Emre* | High school | Turkish | Technician | 27 |
| Gülçin | University | Turkish | Flight attendant | 36 |
| Fatih* | High school | Kurdish | Technician | 36 |
| Gizem | University | Turkish | Flight attendant | 48 |
| Zeynep* | University | Turkish | Flight attendant | 32 |
| Samet* | High school | Kurdish (Alevi) | Technician | 36 |
| Bengisu | High school | Laz | Shipping personnel | 34 |
| Metin** | University | Kurdish | Flight attendant | 33 |
| Koral** | University | Turkish | Marketing Expert | 24 |
| Erdi** | University | Turkish (Alevi) | Marketing Expert | 26 |

*These workers are fired workers.

**These are the ones who did not join in the resistance.