




A Lioness is Also a Lion

A case study of the political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands



Bente Hendriksen
s4768027
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Bente Hendriksen
S4768027
Supervisor: Mathijs van Leeuwen
Master Thesis Human Geography
Specialization: Conflicts, Territories and Identities
Nijmegen School of Management
Radboud University Nijmegen
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Abstract

Kurdish women in the Netherlands are part of a minority group that has been shown to have a low level of political participation. Both non-Western migrants and women are present in politics to a significantly lower degree than that they are present in Dutch society. This research has explored how a number of factors can influence the political participation of Kurdish women in Dutch politics. The methodology of case-study research was used. Data was gathered by conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews, supplemented with participant observation.

Similar to the findings of previous literature, this research found that displacement can both have an empowering as well as marginalizing effect on women. The experience of displacement was found to positively contribute to the political participation of some women, by making them aware of injustice and inequality and in this way motivating them to make a change through politics. For other women however, the traumatic experiences in the country of origin have led to distrust and disillusionment with politics, preventing them from participating in Dutch politics. The development of female empowerment and increased gender equality in Kurdish parties in Turkey had a positive effect on the political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. By the spread of an ideology that promotes equality ideals, Kurdish women gained the opportunity to become politically active and gave them a reason to get involved. While tradition and religion have been labelled as an obstacle to the participation of migrant women in Dutch society in public debate, this study found that this factor had little effect on the political participation of Kurdish women in Dutch politics, either positive or negative. A similar conclusion can be drawn for the effect of discrimination and prejudices towards migrant women in the Netherlands.

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1. Kurdish women, the Lionesses

Many people have seen images on television of Kurdish women in uniform, carrying weapons on their way to fight ISIS. Few people however know about the role of Kurdish women in other parts of their society, battling the status-quo of gender inequality to gain access to education, media and politics in Turkey. Signifying this struggle, a saying was developed among Kurds, that has become the title of this thesis: a lioness is also a lion. This symbolizes the realization of Kurdish women that they are not different from men, and can do anything men can.

Due to the continuing conflict in Turkey, as well as various other reasons, many Kurdish women were forced to leave their country and settle in another, often European country. A significant amount of Kurds has settled in the Netherlands.¹ Little is known however about the political activism of Kurdish women after migration. Can the same developments of women empowerment, increased activism and political participation of Kurdish women in Turkey also be noticed among Kurdish women in the Netherlands and in Dutch politics? This is the question that will be explored in this thesis, with the aim to understand the factors that have influenced the political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands.

1.1 Research objective and research questions

This research looks into the case of Kurdish women in Turkey who are now residing in the Netherlands, to study their involvement in Dutch politics. The research provides an insight into the factors that influence the political activity of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. The central research question is formulated as follows:

- What factors have influenced the political participation in Dutch politics of Kurdish women in the Netherlands?

To answer the central question, a number of sub-questions will be answered. As the aim is to understand what factors have influenced political participation of Kurdish women, the sub-questions concern the specific factors that will be explored. A specific set of factors have been identified, using existing literature on political involvement of migrant women in the Netherlands, as well as literature concerning the Kurdish community in Turkey. The first question explores the effect of displacement.

¹ It is estimated that around 70.000 Kurds live in the Netherlands (Belhaj, 2017).

- How has the experience of displacement affected the political participation of Kurdish women in Dutch politics?

Previous literature has found that displacement can greatly affect behaviour. Research specifically on displaced women uncovered contrasting mechanisms resulting from displacement that can either empower women to participate in politics or other parts of society, or further marginalize them (e.g. Ayata, 2011; Ahmetbeyzade, 2007; Gökalp, 2010; Moghissi, 1999). This factor is thus important to explore in the case of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. The second question explores the effect of the developments among Kurdish women in Turkey.

- How has the development of significant levels of gender equality and women empowerment, as observed in the Kurdish political parties in Turkey, influenced the participation of Kurdish women in Dutch politics?

This question has been formulated as it is this factor that makes this case unique. These developments could affect Kurdish women in the Netherlands through their own experience when they were in Turkey, or through their knowledge of these developments. The third sub-question explores the effect of culture and tradition.

- What is the influence of Kurdish traditional culture and religion on the participation of Kurdish women in Dutch politics?

In political debates in the Netherlands, tradition and religion, and especially the 'Islamic culture' has been framed as an obstacle to participation of migrant women in society (Ghorashi, 2010; Roggeband & Verloo, 2007). Whether this factor truly is an obstacle to political participation of Kurdish women will be explored in this research. The final factor that will be explored is the effect of discrimination and prejudices in the Netherlands.

- How have discrimination and prejudices in the Netherlands influenced the political involvement of Kurdish women in Dutch politics?

Some scholars have argued that not the culture of female migrants is the obstacle to participation in Dutch society, but rather the attitudes in the Netherlands towards these women (Ghorashi, 2010; Roggeband & Verloo, 2007). Because of the idea that migrant women are problematic and passive, they are excluded from decision-making processes (Ghorashi, 2010, p. 83). This research will explore whether such ideas and mechanisms affect the political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands.

1.2 Kurdish women in politics: but why?

Understanding the trajectories through which Kurdish women (fail to) become politically active has societal relevance, as it can provide an analytical basis for policy to promote political participation of migrant women in the Netherlands. Why such policy is important will be elaborated upon below. Specific attention will be given to the importance of women in politics. This will be followed by a brief discussion of previous literature on political participation as well as conflict and displacement, and show how this research will contribute to scientific debates on these issues.

1.2.1. Societal relevance

Many people would agree that in for a democracy to be legitimate, political representation should mirror the diversity of society. Women however continue to be underrepresented in politics around the world. The international community has declared its commitment to more gender equality in politics, and it has agreed that this should be a goal (e.g. United Nations, 1995; United Nations Security Council, 2000). Furthermore, specifically in the Netherlands the question of political participation of ethnic minorities has been put on the political agenda. Multiple research projects have been conducted on this topic, often requested by the Dutch government (e.g. ACB Kenniscentrum, 2009; Berger, Fennema, Heelsum, Tillie & Wolff, 2001; Kranendonk & Vermeulen, 2018; Michon & Vermeulen 2009; 2013). These were often aimed at understanding how ethnic minorities did gain access to politics. In these research projects however, there was no gender dimension. Often, distinctions were made between groups of different nationalities, but no distinction was made between experiences of men and women.

In political debates on migrant women, attention is often drawn to the lack of social and economic participation of these women (Ghorashi, 2010). While specific aims for the percentage of women in parliament as well as policy on representation of ethnic minorities was formulated by the Dutch government, no such policy exists specifically for political participation of migrant women (Keuzenkamp, 2006). Political representation of migrant women is however very low, especially in local governments, despite the significant number of migrants living in the Netherlands (idem). This group thus deserves attention, as promoting their political involvement will help to establish a more legitimate democracy in the Netherlands.

That big steps can still be made in the field of political participation of migrant women can be seen in the numbers of political representatives. For example, in 2016 only 6% of local council members had a history of migration, while 87% were Dutch. Of the other 7% the history was unknown. While it is unclear how many migrant council members were women, the total percentage of female local council members was 18%. Women are thus clearly underrepresented in local

councils, and so are migrants. The total migrant population in the Netherlands was 22% of the whole population in 2016, with 12% migrants from non-Western countries (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2017, pp. 22-23). Migrant women are thus underrepresented in politics.

Apart from their representation in politics, interests in politics and political participation of migrant women is also lower than the average political participation of people in the Netherlands in general. Exact numbers are hard to find, because most of the recent research only separately distinguishes between autochthone and allochthone population, as well as between men and women, but not between allochthone men and women (e.g. Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2017; Schmeets, 2017). Numbers from 2006 and 2009 however show that women are significantly less interested in politics, and women are less inclined than men to go voting (Schmeets, 2011). While this is true for autochthone Dutch citizens, this discrepancy is even more striking among some allochthone groups. For example, only 66% of Turkish women declared to be have the intention to vote in the next election, as opposed to 72% of Turkish men. For autochthones the difference was 85% of men and 80% of women (p. 193). Furthermore, the interest in politics of Turkish women was strikingly low. Only 37% of Turkish women declared to be somewhat or very interested in politics, as opposed to 70% of autochthone women (p.191).

Political representation, as well as political interest and participation is thus strikingly low among migrant women in general, and Turkish women in the Netherlands specifically. There are however no specific numbers on the political participation of Kurds, and little is known about the political participation of this specific group. This is an interesting case however, as these Kurdish migrant women are part of the abovementioned groups, but seem to have the potential of higher degrees of political participation due to the developments of female empowerment and increased gender equality in Kurdish political parties in Turkey.

In order to improve policy and achieve higher participation rates of migrant women, politicians, policy advisors and lobbyists need to have an understanding of the mechanisms that influence the political participation of these women. Experiences specifically related to their status as migrants, such as the experience of forced migration, put migrants in a different position than both Dutch women and migrant men. Awareness of these difference is essential to create effective policies to incorporate migrant women in Dutch politics. While certain research has been done to uncover the obstacles faced by migrant women in the Netherlands who come from a position of marginalization (e.g. Ghorashi, 2010; Roggeband & Verloo, 2007), no such research exists on the behaviour of women who have experienced empowerment and a movement towards gender equality in their country of origin, like Kurdish women in the Netherlands. This group of women seems to have the potential to participate in politics, and even serve as representatives or role

models for other migrant women. The mechanisms behind their political participation are however yet unknown. By uncovering some of these mechanisms, this research will contribute to the development of a policy towards the promotion of participation of migrant women in society in general and politics specifically.

In this context, the case of Kurdish women is especially interesting. Within Kurdish communities, women are taking an increasingly active role. Women participate in both the military mobilization as in the political representation of this minority group, despite the conservative nature of the Kurdish population and systematic inequalities existing in Turkey (Dirik, 2014; Sahin-Mencutek, 2016). In Kurdish society, the position of women is strongly determined by their gender and men monitor the behaviour, bodies and sexuality of women (Sahin-Mencutek, 2016, p. 479). Despite these inequalities however, Kurdish political parties in Turkey have installed voluntary gender quota, ensuring women are represented with significant numbers. Previous research has uncovered the ways in which Kurdish women were able to claim this space within the movement and the political parties (Sahin-Mencutek, 2016). This study aims to understand whether this development of empowerment and emancipation can also be noticed among the Kurdish community in the Netherlands. By looking into a number of factors, such as the experience of displacement and the developments of emancipation in Turkey, this research will uncover whether and how these factors have influenced the political space available to Kurdish women.

This is a unique case, as the political empowerment in the country of origin cannot be noticed in any other migrant community in the Netherlands. While this might result in findings that are specific to this case and possibly difficult to generalize, it also has the potential to uncover how female political activism can spread among a community. This will be useful for the promotion of political activism of other groups of migrant women as well, by understanding how an initial development can be promoted and spread among the community. This research will thus have societal relevance by exploring the factors that contribute or hinder the political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. This research will provide insights that might be useful for policy makers to create and adapt policies that promote political participation of migrant women in general and Kurdish women specifically. Understanding how migrant women function in society, how they are active in society and politics in a diaspora community and the obstacles they face in this context are an analytical basis on which policy could be based.

1.2.2 The importance of female representatives

As has been discussed above, results of this research might contribute to the development of policy that promotes political participation of migrant women. But why is such policy important? Research

on political participation of migrants in general has been done before, and policy promoting the participation of migrants and ethnic minorities in the Netherlands already exists, so why focus on women specifically? The following section will go into the reasons why the incorporation of women into politics is important, to further demonstrate the relevance of the study of political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands.

Establishing gender equality has become an increasingly wide-shared aim in the international community, with UN resolutions as well as regional and local conventions being established to show commitment and provide guidelines to achieve this goal (e.g. European Commission, 2016; United Nations, 1995; United Nations Security Council, 2000). As a result of these developments, an increasing number of studies has looked into the issue of women in politics in general and peace processes specifically. These studies mostly focus on results, to see whether incorporating women in politics or raising gender awareness truly improves the situation for women throughout society (e.g. Bell & O'Rourke, 2010; Boyer et al., 2009; Koyuncu & Sumbas, 2016; Mansbridge, 1999).

One of the ways to empower women, is to promote the participation of women in decision-making positions such as political office. This is generally seen as desirable, as a democratic state should represent all citizens. Women make up half of the population, so this should also be reflected in politics. It can however be argued that the incorporation of individual women in politics will not necessarily lead to the promotion of interest of the wider community of women. Furthermore, men might be just as capable to advocate for the rights of women. In other words, the discussion here concerns whether an increase in descriptive representation will also lead to increased substantive representation. Legitimacy of the democratic political system not only comes from the degree that the representatives mirror the overall make up of society, but also the degree that their decision-making represents the actual interests of all groups (Mansbridge, 1999, pp. 629-630).

Despite these valid arguments however, research has shown that there are multiple reasons why the inclusion of women is something to aspire to. First of all, structural absence of a certain group from politics can create a discourse where this group is seen as unfit to rule. Including women in politics challenges this assumption (Mansbridge, 1999, pp. 648-650). Not only men create these assumptions, they also exist in the minds of women. When women see female politicians, they serve as role models and might be motivated other women to get actively involved in political activities (Koyuncu & Sumbas, 2016, p. 45). Research in the United States has shown that this influence could be noticed with female representatives in Congress. The authors concluded:

“Women represented by a woman are more likely to engage in a number of political activities, feel that they can influence the political process, and feel that they are

sufficiently competent to do so than women represented by a man” (High-Pippert & Comer, 1998, pp. 60-61).

This research thus shows the psychological effect of female representation on the women they represent. Apart from this empowering effect, it also ensures increased political legitimacy. Underrepresented groups are more likely to feel included when ‘one of them’ serves as a representative for their interests (Mansbridge, 1999, pp. 650-652). Furthermore, research has also shown that descriptive representatives are more likely to ensure substantial representation when interests are relatively uncrystallised. When subjects arise which were not yet on the political agenda during elections, it is more likely that a descriptive representative will act in the interests of the represented. Through the existence of shared experiences, descriptive representatives are capable to incorporate these experiences in the debates of the issue at hand. This not only ensures that the relevant interests are represented, but also that these interests are presented by someone with the authority of experience (pp. 643-648). Finally, Mansbridge notes that descriptive representation is also beneficial when the communication between different groups is impaired (pp. 641-643). Koyuncu and Sumbas (2016) came up with the same conclusion when looking at the case of female mayors in Turkey. Their research showed that women had significantly increased access to the regional political system in municipalities with a female mayor, as they felt safe to communicate with the mayor and enter the municipal buildings. This had not been the case when their mayor was male (p. 46).

Apart from the benefits of female representatives for women, the incorporation of women into decision-making also has more general practical benefits to the whole community. In a research conducted with middle- and high-school students, it was concluded that incorporating women into decision-making environment can substantially alter the behaviour of the group (Boyer, et al., 2009, p. 37). This is not only the case when women participate in the negotiations, but also when they act as mediators (p. 38). They conclude that “diversity in gender will thus bring diversity in viewpoints, and diversity in the ways we consider the issue at hand” (p. 43). We can thus conclude that the international community has affirmed its commitment to achieve the incorporation of women in politics, and that research has confirmed the benefits of achieving this aim. Women however continue to be underrepresented in politics, and participation of migrant women is especially low. This research aims to contribute to this participation by uncovering mechanisms that influence this political participation, and effective policy can be developed with an awareness of these mechanisms.

1.2.3 Scientific relevance

Apart from the contribution this research can make to policy development, it will also contribute to scientific debates on political participation and the effects of displacement. Studies have shown that conflict and displacement can create social and political processes that result in an increased amount of agency for women. Displacement however can also result in new forms of repression that prevent women from benefitting from the new situation (Ahmetbeyzade, 2007; Gökalp, 2010; Moghissi, 1999). Previous studies look at the way women can or cannot be empowered by conflict and displacement when coming from a position of marginalization. In the case of the Kurdish community however, such marginalization is decreasing by the process of female empowerment can be noticed in the country of origin. Kurdish women can thus be expected to participate in politics of the host country to a greater degree than other groups of migrant women. This research will explore whether this is actually the case and if not, the reasons behind this lack of participation will be explored. In this way, this research will create a better understanding of the trajectories through which politically empowered women (fail to) acquire and sustain roles in society and politics after their experience of displacement.

Previous research has theorized about factors that influence political participation. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) identified three general factors to explain individual political participation: resources, networks and psychological engagement. While many scholars agree that these are important explanatory factors for political participation, additional research has shown that these variables have a different effect on migrant communities. For example, resources seem to affect political participation of migrants less than it does the political participation of the general population, while networks do play an exceptionally important role in the political participation of many migrants (e.g. Tam Cho, 1999; Kranendonk & Vermeulen, 2018; Michon & Vermeulen, 2009). These differences will be further explored in chapter three.

Specific research has been conducted to understand the mechanisms behind political participation of immigrants (e.g. Martiniello, 2005; Rooij, 2012; Tam Cho, 1999; Tillie, 2007; Togeby, 2007). While these have brought important insights, the majority of this research is quantitative. This type of research is very useful to uncover the influence of general factors such as age and gender on political participation. It is however impossible to prove *why* these factors are significant. It is possible to theorize about this, but to find out how different variables interact to explain individual political participation, it is necessary to conduct qualitative research. To understand the specific factors that influence political participation of migrant women in the Netherlands, this research will look beyond these general influences and understand the specific mechanisms behind political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. This will contribute to the scientific debate on

political participation, as well as contributing to the debate on the effects of conflict and displacement on migrant women in general, and specifically on their political participation.

1.3 Political participation

To define the concept of political participation, the conceptualization first proposed by van Deth (2014) will be used. According to this definition, a distinction can be made between institutionalized political participation and noninstitutionalized political participation (Deth, 2014). He defines institutionalized political participation as 'voluntary acts conducted by citizens and located in the sphere of government, state or politics' (Deth, 2014; Kranendonk & Vermeulen, 2018, p. 4). Voting is a form of institutionalized political participation, but can be distinguished from other forms of institutionalized participation because of the low costs. Unlike other forms of institutionalized political participation, voting is not necessarily very time consuming and thus relatively easy to do (Kranendonk & Vermeulen, 2018, p. 4; Verba et al., 1995). Therefore, voting will be taken as a separate category of political activity, rather than include it in the category of institutionalized political participation.

Apart from casting a ballot, there are multiple other forms of institutionalized political participation, such as being a member of a political party, running for or holding political office. It is these activities that will be referred to as institutionalized political participation in this study. This form of political participation can be distinguished from noninstitutionalized political participation. Noninstitutionalized political participation will be defined as 'voluntary acts conducted by citizens, not located in the sphere of government, state, or politics, but targeted at it (Deth, 2014; Kranendonk & Vermeulen, 2018, p. 4). Examples are participating in rallies, protests or demonstrations, signing petitions or participating in political debates on the internet. The difference between these activities and institutionalized political participation is that these are not within the sphere of institutionalized government, state or politics, but rather aimed at it. These activities are not part of the official decision-making process of politics, but they can have a great effect by influencing this process. Through organizing a protest or creating discussion on a subject in the media, something can be put on the political agenda.

While engagement in either form of political participation will qualify someone as politically active, it is important to make the distinction between these categories in order to qualify and interpret the findings of this study. The ways in which the women who were interviewed participated in politics varied to a significant extent. The factors, as defined in the sub-questions of this research, were also found to have different effects on either institutionalized or noninstitutionalized participation.

1.4 Case: Kurdish women in the Netherlands

To better understand how and why migrant women (fail to) be politically active, this research will look into the case study of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. With an estimated number of 70.000 Kurds currently living in the Netherlands (Belhaj, 2017), it is a significant ethnic minority in this country. A large part of these are originally from Turkey, others are from Iraq, Iran or Syria. While no specific numbers exist on the political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands, these women belong to the group of non-Western migrant women with a low rate of political representation. What makes this case specifically interesting is the political empowerment that can be noticed in the Kurdish community in Turkey. Kurdish political parties in Turkey have an exceptionally high percentage of women active within their party. This is an especially striking development as women participate to a significantly lower degree in other political parties in Turkey. Furthermore, the Kurdish community on which these parties rely for support can be classified as traditional and patriarchal. Previous research has uncovered the reasons for this development, where both the party and the movement behind it created the space for women to actively participate in politics (Sahin-Mencutek, 2016).

This research aims to explore whether this development of women empowerment and political participation can also be noticed among Kurdish women within their community in the Netherlands. Apart from the influence of the Kurdish ideology, this study will look into the effect of displacement, tradition and religion, as well as prejudices and discrimination on the political activity of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. Before these results are presented however, the context of the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurds will be elaborated upon. This will be followed by a discussion on theory of political participation, displacement and representation. The fourth chapter will elaborate upon the research design, methodology and methods that have been used. In the fifth chapter, the results of this study will be presented, going into the separate sub-questions. Finally, the conclusion will be presented.

2. Context: Conflict and Empowerment

This chapter will give a historical overview of the conflict between Turkey and the Kurds. It is important to understand this context, as the conflict still has an impact on the lives of Kurdish women living in the Netherlands. Especially the connection with friends and family living in the conflict area results in a continued involvement with the development in Turkey. For some women, this has also affected their involvement in Dutch politics on this subject. Furthermore, the historical overview looks at the way the ideology of Kurdish nationalist groups has developed, specifically the development of the position of women within these groups. Understanding this ideology is important, as this has influenced many of the respondents interviewed during this research. It is this ideology that has inspired some of the Kurdish women to become politically active in either Turkey or the Netherlands. Understanding of this context will thus contribute to understanding the factors that influence the political participation of Kurdish women in Dutch politics.

The origin of the current conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish state can be traced far back in time. Some say that it has its roots in the mid-nineteenth century, when the Ottoman state attempted to impose direct rule over what was then Kurdistan (Yegen, 2016, p. 366). Since that time, multiple Kurdish groups have struggled for autonomy against a variety of oppressors. The end of the First World War, followed by the Turkish War of Independence, led to the establishment of the Turkish state. These wars and the following geopolitical struggles created a situation where the Kurds became a minority in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran without having an independent Kurdish state. While recent developments such as the war in Syria have reshuffled the distribution of power in the region, the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdish minority in the country continues to exist.

Many authors agree that it was the modernization project of the Turkish state that gave rise to Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish nationalist organizations (Ahmetbeyzade, 2007; Davis, Larson, Haldeman, Oguz, & Rana, 2012; Gutaj & Al, 2016; Yüksel, 2006). The aim of this modernization project was to create an ethnically, linguistically and culturally homogeneous Turkish nation and nation state. This resulted in the denial of the Kurdish identity, as all Muslims were considered to belong to one 'Muslim nation' (Davis et al., 2012, p. 100; Yüksel, 2006, pp. 777-778). Expressions of Kurdish identity such as cultural practices and social rituals were suppressed by the Turkish state, and it was even forbidden to speak or teach the Kurdish language in public (Ahmetbeyzade, 2007, p. 162). The modernization project in Turkey did provide some room for the development of feminist organizations, as it aimed at the 'emancipation' of Turkish women. Yet, as the Kurdish identity was denied, Kurdish women were excluded from this process. This led to what have some called 'double marginalization'. The experience of being a women was considerably different for Turkish and

Kurdish women, and simultaneously there existed a gap between Kurdish men and women (Yüksel, 2006, pp. 777-779).

Until the 1970s, there was a variety of Kurdish organizations that aimed at the establishment of a Kurdish state, independent from Turkey. This changed with the rise of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK), established in 1978 as a clandestine political party. Where the Kurdish organizations before the PKK prioritized political struggle, the PKK perceived and used armed struggle as their main instrument against the Turkish state (Yegen, 2016, p. 370). The organization actively worked to establish a monopoly on the Kurdish nationalist struggle by eliminating rival organizations. This process was completed when the 1980 *coup d'état* led to a suppression of all democratic channels of civic and political associational life. All revolutionary leftist organizations were crushed by the Turkish state, including the Kurdish parties. The PKK however managed to survive, because a few months before the coup the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, had fled with a small group of militants to the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon (Davis et al., 2012, p. 101; Gutaj & Al, 2016, p. 95; Schoon, 2017, p. 741; Yegen, 2016, p. 372).

In 1984 the PKK started its guerilla warfare against the Turkish state, initiating decades of violence. The Turkish government responded to the violence of the PKK by installing the Village Guard System, where local citizens were given weapons and were transformed into militia to fight the PKK. This led to violent attacks by the PKK on these village guards and further escalation of violence when the Turkish state responded with more military action. The resulting brutalities such as the forced evacuation and torching of villages had the unintended consequence of reinforcing the popular support for the PKK (Schoon, 2017, pp. 742-745; Yegen, 2016, pp. 373-374; Yüksel, 2006, p. 780).

It is in the ranks of the PKK that women were first mobilized, starting on a large scale in the 1990s (Gökalp, 2010, p. 566). While this was mostly done for pragmatic purposes, to increase the number of fighters, this development influenced the position of women in Kurdish society as a whole. These female guerilla fighters showed that women were capable to fight and do the same things as men (Sahin-Mencutek, 2016, p. 480). While Kurdish nationalism remained attached to patriarchal ideas, women gained a gender or even feminist consciousness through the mobilization and politicization of women (Yüksel, 2006, p. 780). This led to the establishment of women's organizations and an increasing consciousness of the importance of gender equality throughout the Kurdish nationalist movement.

With the capture of Öcalan in 1999 and the European Union's recognition of Turkey as a candidate member state, some linguistic and cultural rights were granted to the Kurds. This led Öcalan to declare his commitment to a peaceful struggle while respecting the democratic republic.

While the principles of an unarmed struggle were later refuted, Öcalan did formulate a new program in prison in which he rejected the notion of an independent Kurdish state and promoted principles of gender equality and ecology. The PKK and the political parties in Turkey associated with it, have proclaimed their support for this new ideology (Davis et al., 2012 pp. 100, 108; Yegen, 2016, pp. 377-378). With the formulation of this new vision that included feminism and the 'liberation' of Kurdish women, Öcalan acknowledged and supported the struggle for gender equality that had already developed among women of the Kurdish movement. Eventually this even led to the establishment of gender quota in the Kurdish political parties in Turkey associated with the PKK (Koyuncu & Sumbas, 2016, p. 43; Sahin-Mencuek, 2016, p. 477).

While a peace process was initiated in 2012, the parties failed to reach an agreement and peace negotiations were shut down in 2015. Immediately after the elections that year violence continued (Yegen, 2016, p. 380). The security situation in the country deteriorated further by the threat of ISIS, especially in Southern Turkey, and the involvement of Kurdish armed groups in the Syrian conflict. President Erdogan seems to opt for the continuation of a military approach to the Kurdish problem, despite the evidence that such an approach has contributed to support for the PKK in the past (Larrabee, 2016, p. 69). The current situation thus does not seem to be moving in the direction of de-escalation or even towards a peace process. Larrabee (2016) notes however that 'the roots of the Kurdish problem are primarily political and social in nature. They cannot be overcome by military means' (p. 71). Eventually, Turkey will have to move towards political negotiation in order to end this 'low intensity' conflict.

The conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish state has caused intense suffering over the years, and has forced many Kurds to seek refuge outside of Turkey. This context of violence and conflict has affected many of the women who were interviewed for this research. Some of them experienced the conflict directly, and all of them continue to be involved in it through friends and family who live in Turkey. Involvement with the conflict has directly affected the political involvement of many of the women, for some positively and for others negatively. The details of these effects will be discussed in chapter five. Apart from an insight into the conflict, this chapter also addressed the development of Kurdish women taking an increasingly important role in the Kurdish movement and political parties in Turkey. Starting in the PKK, this development of female empowerment has spread across Kurdish communities. Many of the Kurdish women interviewed for this research have either experienced this development in Turkey themselves, or have been inspired by it after arriving in the Netherlands. How this development has affected these women will be also be elaborated upon in the fifth chapter. Before this can be done however, the theoretical frame will be elaborated upon, followed by an insight into the methods and methodology that were used.

3. Theoretical frame

This chapter explores existing theoretical insights into the political participation of migrant women. First, the existing knowledge political participation of migrants will be discussed. This will be followed by a reflection on the theoretical debates concerning the influence of displacement on political participation of migrant women. Finally, this chapter will address the concepts of representation, women empowerment and gender equality. Together, this will provide the theoretical basis of the research.

3.1 Political participation of migrants

Previous research has theorized about factors that influence political participation. Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995), through extensive research in the United States found that resources, networks and psychological engagement are the three main factors explaining individual political participation. Resources concern issues such as education, money, time and civic skills. Networks can be informal relationships with friends and acquaintances, or being part of a formal organization. Finally, psychological engagement is the level of interest in politics. Verba et al. used these three factors to explain political participation of individuals, and show trends of participation among different cultural communities in the United States. First of all, resources are necessary conditions that have to present to a certain extent before an individual has the capacity to engage in politics. These resources however are not a motivation to become politically active (Tam Cho, 1999). Secondly, networks can stimulate political participation in a variety of ways. Verba et al. (1995) for example showed how activism can move from generation to generation, and the political activism of children can thus be influenced by familial relations. Stekelenburg, Klandermans and Akkerman (2016) showed how membership of civic organizations can stimulate both collective and individual political activities. Finally, psychological engagement is brought forward as a factor influencing political participation. While the connection between interest in politics and participating in politics seems quite logical, it is quite an unfulfilling explanation as it remains unclear where this psychological engagement comes from.

Apart from these three general factors, specific determinants such as gender, age and generational cohort have been found to influence political participation (Martiniello, 2005, p. 88). Specific research on immigrants however has found that these factors influence political participation differently for this group than for the majority of the population (Rooij, 2011; Tam Cho, 1999). Socio-economic factors seem to play a less important role in the political participation of immigrants as opposed to non-migrants. Tam Cho (1999) argues that socialization, leading to a greater sense of civic duty, efficacy in voting and adherence to democratic ideals can explain political participation of

immigrants (p. 1153). In her work, it remains unclear however what can bring such socialization about.

One of the factors that has been found to influence this political socialization are associational networks. Like Verba et al. (1995) found in their research, formal and informal networks have an effect on political participation. With regard to networks, the effects of this factor on political participation do not differ greatly between migrants and non-migrants. Research has however shown some specific mechanisms that are present for immigrants. The majority of this research has shown that immigrant or ethnic associations have a positive effect on political participation (Martiniello, 2005; Tillie, 2007; Togeby, 2007). This can be explained by the nature of organizations to aim for a common goal, whether this is a political or other goal. Furthermore, organizations are a means to spread information and can reach and activate isolated individuals (Martiniello, 2005, p. 97).

As Martiniello (2005) notes, within the Turkish communities in the Netherlands, religious associations are more numerous than other types of organizations (p. 97). It can however be questioned whether such organisations also positively contribute to political participation. Kranendonk and Vermeulen (2018) explored how individual's group networks and social identification of Moroccan and Turkish immigrants relate to political participation. They found that embeddedness in religious networks had a positive effect on political participation of Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands, while the same factor negatively affected political participation of Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands. Networks can thus promote political participation, but can also have the opposite effect. All of the research discussed above agree however that networks seem to have a significant effect on political participation of migrants. Therefore, this research will specifically look into the way this factor influences the political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands.

Another factor that can have an effect of the political participation of migrants, is the experience of displacement. Previous research on the effects of displacement show both the empowering potential of displacement, as well as the possibility of reproducing patriarchal structures in diaspora communities. Specific research has been done on the effects of displacement of Kurds on their socio-economical position, as well as their political participation. For this group, a distinction can be made between internal displacement and international displacement. Ayata (2011) has analysed both of these phenomena. First she discussed the situation of internally displaced Kurds, who have been forced by the Turkish states to relocate from Southeast Turkey to the periphery of large cities. She argues that this forced displacement has caused the marginalization of these Kurds by causing unemployment, poverty and crime.

When analysing the effect of the arrival of Kurdish refugees in Europe in the 1990's, Ayata (2011) comes to a different conclusion. Instead of resulting in socio-economic problems, international migration has led to a transnational mobilization of Kurds. Throughout Europe, Kurds used the opportunities of establishing political activities as well as media outlets directed at improving the condition for Kurds in Turkey. In this way, displacement has thus contributed to the ability of Kurds to be politically active.

It is however the question whether this political mobilization has equally affected Kurdish men and women. Displacement can produce the reconstruction of patriarchal structures and contribute to the marginalization of women. After arriving in a new country with a different culture, it is possible for people to feel like this new culture poses a threat to their identity. This can lead people to attempt to preserve their communal dignity and cultural identity, sometimes leading to even stricter interpretations of cultural norms and values than they were used to in their country of origin. Such cultural essentialism might oppose ideals of gender equality and democratic rights, and thus contribute to the marginalization of women (Moghissi, 1999).

Other studies however show that displacement also has the potential to empower women. A study specifically on internal displacement of Kurdish women in Turkey has explored these mechanisms. It concluded that by breaking down the social relations and networks in which women previously lived, structures of governance and justice can be changed. While these dynamics also have the potential of creating new forms of repression, women can gain bargaining power within their homes and communities. This newfound power allows them to have more influence on their own life (Gökalp, 2010, p. 564). Ahmetbeyzade (2007) has also provided evidence for the empowerment of women to resist patriarchal domination through his case study of internally displaced Kurds. This study focused on this resistance by the contribution of women to the construction and representation of the homeland.

While these studies concern internal displacement, the dynamics that created the space for the empowerment of women are also created by international displacement. Previous social relations and networks which created the patriarchal structures suppressing women are also left behind when relocating abroad. Displacement thus has the potential to contribute to the empowerment of women by creating physical distance between them and their old networks and relations that created the structure for patriarchal oppression and allowing for political mobilization on the Kurdish issue. Research has however also shown that displacement can have negative effects on female empowerment, by reproducing cultural practices that restrict women from political participation. With both these perspectives in mind, this research will explore how Kurdish women in

the Netherlands are affected by displacement. The aim is to understand whether, and how this factor has contributed to either their empowerment or marginalization.

3.2 Representation, empowerment and transformation

As the research concerns political activity of women, it is important to understand in which ways women can be represented in politics. As has been discussed above, female political activity is both a means to gender equality, as well as an end in itself for those aspiring to achieve gender equality. It is thus important to understand this concept. First of all, the concept of representation will be explored. This will be followed by a reflection on strategies to establish women empowerment and gender equality, relating this to the previous section on representation. Finally, the concept of 'transformation' will be discussed, which is a possible result of both the strategies for gender equality and forms of representation. These concepts will provide the basis for the research into the situation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands.

Some of the practical and moral arguments in favour of the inclusion of women in politics have been discussed above. Here, some specific forms of representation were already discussed: descriptive and substantive representation. These concepts were first put forward by Hanna Pitkin (1967) in her highly influential discussion of the concept of political representation. She distinguishes between four forms of representation: formalistic representation, symbolic representation, descriptive representation and substantive representation. Formalistic representation concerns the institutional arrangements that define political representation. Symbolic representation concerns the view of those being represented towards the representative, and the degree in which they accept the representation. Descriptive representation concerns the degree to which the representative is similar to those represented. Finally, substantive representation concerns the actions of the representative and the degree to which these serve the interests of the represented (Dovi, 2017). Descriptive representation was already discussed above, because this is the core of this research; the involvement of women in politics. An important question that was already raised above, is however whether descriptive representation should be an aim in itself, or if it is a means to establish substantive representation. Symbolic representation and formalistic representation have received less attention in academic debates on female political representation. These concepts are however useful when analysing the position of women in politics, as it allows us to understand different ways in which women can be represented in politics.

As has been discussed above, to ensure gender equality both descriptive representation and substantive representation are necessary. Representation is however both a means to ensure gender equality, as it is a result of existing gender equality. To ensure women are represented in politics, a

certain level of female empowerment and existing gender equality is necessary. To be represented, women at least need the opportunity to influence the political process. To understand how representation can come about, we have to look at the process of establishing emancipation and gender equality. Judith Squires (1999) has defined three analytically different political strategies aimed at gender equality: the strategy on inclusion, the strategy of reversal and the strategy of displacement. Verloo (2005) explains these strategies according to the assumption they start from, the aim they have and the issue that is problematized. Due to the differences between these strategies, they can be connected to different forms of representation.

The *strategy of inclusion* is based on the principle of equality. The exclusion of women is seen as the core problem, and it thus aims at the inclusion of women into the world as it is. There should be impartiality, equality and gender-neutrality in politics. In other words, the goal of this strategy is to establish more descriptive representation for women. The *strategy of reversal* is based on the principle of gender difference. As men and women are not the same, the aim of this strategy is to create an awareness of specific gendered interests and needs in politics. It is thus not neutrality, but responsiveness to both male and female needs that is aspired to. It is men and male culture and practices that are problematized. This strategy can be related to substantive representation. Rather than including women in politics on a physical level, this strategy aims at increasing their substantive representation by incorporating specific interests and needs of women into politics. Finally, the *strategy of displacement* is based on the principle of diversity. The aim is to move 'beyond gender'. Advocates of this strategy deny the apparent opposition between equality and difference. Not just the exclusion of women or men as the norm is problematized, but the whole concept of a gendered world is seen as problematic. Gendered identities are argued to be a result of a particular political discourse, and by changing this discourse the world can thus be defined on other terms than a 'gendered' one (Verloo, 2005, pp. 345-346). This third strategy can be related to formalistic representation. It aims to reformulate the discourse on which the system is based, and thus change the existing formalistic representation.

The final form of representation, symbolic representation, is difficult to relate to a specific strategy towards gender equality. While the other forms of representation are quite practical, concerning physical presence of women, actions of representatives and the structure of the system, symbolic representation concerns the feelings of the represented towards the representative. This form of representation thus has the represented as its subject, rather than the representative. The political strategies towards gender equality are all aimed at political change, rather than changing the perceptions of those represented. This is why none of the strategies can be directly connected to symbolic representation, even though such strategies might affect symbolic representation.

Different forms of female representation are thus outcomes of specific strategies towards gender equality. An important question however is whether these developments will result in a change in the patriarchal power structure. A term often used in this context is 'transformation'. When transformation is achieved, not only the opportunities, access and the degree of participation and representation are more equally distributed between men and women, but the unequal distribution of power is fundamentally changed (Verloo, 2005; Waal, 2006). Women thus not only have the opportunity to participate, but can also bring about different policies, put issues on the agenda and maybe even bring about a change in the system. While this is not necessarily the outcome of any strategy, some have the potential to achieve this shift in the distribution of power, while others do not.

The strategy of reversal and the strategy of displacement both have the potential to establish transformation, as they aspire to a change in the system. The strategy of reversal aims at changing the system to becoming more responsive to the specific needs of women, while the strategy of displacement aims to remove the concept of gender from political discourse completely. Both of these strategies thus have the potential to shift the distribution of power towards a more balanced position. The strategy of inclusion however is an integrationist rather than transformative approach. It aims at inclusion of women, but if women participate under conditions of inequality this does not necessarily empower them to represent an alternative agenda of gender equality (Verloo, 2005, pp. 346-348). Women thus may gain increased descriptive representation without increased substantive representation.

As described above, previous research has looked into the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation (Koyuncu & Sumbas, 2016; Mansbridge, 1999). While this is not an objective of this research project, these concepts are of importance to it. The developments both in Turkey and in the Kurdish community in the Netherlands show similarities to specific strategies towards female empowerment and gender equality. Uncovering these similarities will enable us to explain which forms of representation are likely to occur. Furthermore, it will be possible to understand if there is potential to establish transformation, and shift the balance of power more towards women.

4. Research design

In this chapter, I will explain the choice of methodology, as well as the methods I used for data collection and the way I selected the participants of this study. I will start by explaining the choice for this research design that flows from this methodology as well as the benefits and drawbacks associated with such research. Afterwards, I will go into the details of the data collection and the operationalization of the key concepts. Finally, the process of analysis will be elaborated upon.

4.1 Methodology

As has been discussed above, a lot of the previous research on political participation of migrants has been quantitative research (e.g. Rooij, 2012; Tam Cho, 1999; Tillie, 2007; Togeby, 2007). While this has provided interesting insights into the factors that influence political participation, it is impossible to understand how these causal mechanisms work. With qualitative research, it is possible to explore such mechanisms in detail. Through a case study of political activity of Kurdish women in the Netherlands, it is possible to uncover mechanisms, details and interaction between variables that would be impossible to find with quantitative research. An example is the attitudes women have towards politics. While quantitative research might show that a lower degree of trust in the political system will lead to a lower degree of participation in politics, qualitative research can go a step further and uncover where these attitudes come from. This study has attempted to do this extra step, and explore the full story behind the ideas, attitudes and motivations that lead to the political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. The choice for this method does mean that the results will be very specific for this case, and might be hard to generalize. Relating the findings to previous (quantitative) research can however show whether the results are truly specific to this case, or if similar trends can be noticed in a broader spectrum. The combination of previous research with the new findings through qualitative research will thus be the best way to provide new insights.

The methodology of case study research is specifically suited to explore in-depth a specific case that can be found in reality and study this in its own context. This is why such an approach is useful to study the political activity of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. It is the interaction between these women and their environment in their daily lives that shapes their experiences and actions. The reasons why they do or do not participate in politics can be complex and multifaceted, and to uncover the mechanisms behind this participation it is important to understand the details before drawing general conclusions. Case study research makes it possible to uncover these details and understand the context that shapes the specific situation.

4.2 Data collection

Multiple methods have been used to gather the information presented in this thesis. This was done in order to ensure ‘triangulation’, where data generated by different methods is used to compare and complement all these findings (Clifford, Cope, Gillespie, & French, 2016, pp. 586-587). The methods that were used are semi-structured interviews and participant observation. This research was done in the Netherlands, in a variety of cities and villages. Often, I would travel to the city of residence of the interviewees, or go to the location where a meeting of a Kurdish organization was held.

The starting point of my research was the contacts I acquired through a Kurdish colleague and friend. She brought me in contact with a number of Kurdish women whom I was able to interview. Furthermore, she recommended me to go to the screening of a Kurdish documentary, where I met another respondent. During this evening I also established contact with dr.ir. Jongerden, who introduced me to a woman active in a Kurdish organization. After establishing these initial contacts, I gathered respondents through the snowball method. All the women I spoke to were very willing to assist me by recommending friend or acquaintances for me to interview, and were so kind to help me contact them. Furthermore, these women invited me for numerous events where I could participate as well as establish further contacts. This has resulted in the data that is presented in this thesis.

Respondent	First / second generation	Age	Arrival in NL	Country of origin (of parents)
1	First generation	44	1999	Turkey
2	First generation	45-50	2012	Turkey
3	First generation	40-50	Age 7	Turkey
4	Second generation	40	Born in NL	Turkey
5	First generation	± 30	Age 11	Turkey
6	Second generation	43	Born in NL	Turkey
7	Second generation	24	Born in NL	Iraq
8	First generation	± 36	2015	Turkey
9	First generation	± 40	2017	Turkey
10	First generation	± 34	2005	Turkey
11	First generation	± 40	Age 10	Turkey

Table 1. Respondents

4.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

The most important source of data for this research were semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The full list of respondents, as well as some details about their background, can be found in Table 1. All of the interviews were conducted in Dutch. For each of these interviews, I had prepared a list of

subjects that I wanted to discuss. To ensure that all of the women were aware of the subject of the research, the conversation often started with a brief explanation of my research aim and expectations of the interview. Often, women would respond to this with their own ideas about the subject, and this was a good way to make them more comfortable to share information about themselves. There was no specific order in which the subjects were discussed, and during the interview I made sure to leave room for the women to influence the course of the interview. This regularly led to interesting remarks, and I would regularly formulate follow-up questions on the spot, to ensure the themes that were brought up were fully explored.

The majority of the interviews were conducted one-on-one. This ensured the privacy of the women, and ensured that they felt free to talk about any subject. For the same reason, when discussing the results in this thesis, the names of the women will not be mentioned or have been changed. In some cases however, family members were present during the interview. Sometimes this was for practical reasons, to provide assistance with the Dutch language. Other times there was no specific need for a family member to be around, but their presence did not hinder the interview and might have provided comfort to the women when talking about sensitive subjects.

On one occasion, a group-interview with six women was conducted. All of these women were part of a women's council of a Kurdish organization. One of these women proposed a group interview, and this was an opportunity to talk to these women who were difficult to reach due to their busy lives. Furthermore, interviewing these women together provided an interesting setting to better understand the concept of a women's council. As these women were familiar with each other, they were able to speak freely and were not afraid to contradict each other. Such a dynamic of open discussion provided some specific interesting insights.

While interviews are a useful tool to understand the experiences of people, there are some drawbacks and possible problems that should be kept in mind. First of all, as the interviewees will be aware of the subject of the research, this might influence the answers they give. The focus on a specific subject may cause some exaggeration or a more positive portrayal than what exists in reality. Interviewees might not do this on purpose, and not be aware of these biases. While it will be hard to steer clear of any biases of the interviewees, this can be overcome to a certain extent by comparing and verifying statements across interviews. It is however important to be aware of this risk.

4.1.2 Participant observation

Apart from the interviews, additional data was gathered by using participant observation. During the course of this research, I have visited events such as the screening of a documentary, the celebration

of *Newroz*² and a two-weekly breakfast meeting. During these activities, contact was made with the people present. Informal conversations allowed me to gain information from a large variety of Kurds present at these activities. While these activities were not explicitly political in nature, some of them did have political implications. For example, during the *Newroz* celebrations, attention was given to the conflict in Afrin, and the role of the Dutch and European governments in these events. Joining in conversations on these subjects, as well as observing the people during these events allowed me to gain an insight into the dynamics of political activism through networks. Furthermore, through observations I was able to gain a better insight into the dynamics between Kurdish men and women. Observing how people interact and what roles they took provided an insight into the implementation of gender equality within Kurdish communities. As some women explained during the interviews, people sometimes theoretically support the idea of gender equality, but in reality do not act accordingly, often unintentionally. Observations such as a woman speaking on stage and taking the lead during a celebration, or smaller acts such as a man serving tea and biscuits while I interviewed his wife, showed how gender equality did occur in reality.

With participant observation, as with all ethnographic research, interpretation of the data is largely dependent on the point of view of the researcher. While this is a significant risk, it is impossible to fully avoid it. Through openness about the data and how this was gathered, the influence can be minimized. Furthermore, being aware of this risk and acknowledging it enables us to see the limitations of this research. It is never possible to objectively present the truth, and I have no intention of claiming such results. With the gathered data, some insights into the factors that influence the political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands can be given. These results will however not be exhaustive and only through further research their validity can be established. Proposals for such further research will be given in the conclusion of this thesis.

4.2 Operationalization

To classify the findings from this research, the variables will be defined. First, the operationalization of the dependent variable, political participation, will be defined using some previous studies on this subject. Following, the independent variables as defined in the sub-questions will be discussed.

² Traditional Kurdish celebration of the arrival of spring, strongly connected to the struggle for freedom of the Kurds.

4.2.1 Political participation

To determine whether a participant of the study can be classified as politically active depends on a variety of factors. As has been elaborated upon above, a distinction can be made between institutionalized and non-institutionalized political participation, following the definition by van Deth (2014). These concepts, as well as the operationalization formulated by van Deth make it possible to study a wide variety of activities that can be qualified as political participation. Previous studies often used limited proxies to represent political participation, such as voting, involvement in electoral campaigns, party membership or contacting local politicians (e.g. Aars & Christensen, 2018; Beauregard, 2013; Martiniello, 2005). These activities are expressions of political participation, but this is not an exhaustive list. While the operationalization of political participation as defined below is also not completely exhaustive, it includes a wider range of activities that can be classified as political participation. Using this list of activities made it possible to find out how women were involved in politics in the Netherlands in a wider sense of the word than just voting or running for political office.

Despite the fact that political participation can entail much more than just voting, the act of voting is an important indicator of political participation. In this study, it was determined if women had voted since they had arrived in the Netherlands. In March 2018 the elections for the municipality took place, so interviewees were asked if they voted on this occasion. Furthermore, it was discussed whether they have voted on other occasions and if they had the intention to vote in the future. Some of the interviewees had arrived in the Netherlands very recently, or were granted asylum only recently and thus did not yet have the opportunity to vote in this country. In this case, only their intention to vote was discussed.

The activities that show institutionalized political participation include being a member of a political party, running for and holding political office, contacting a political party or organization and contacting a politician (Deth, 2014; Kranendonk & Vermeulen, 2018, p. 13). Acts of noninstitutionalized political participation include using radio, TV or newspapers to express political ideas, participating in protest action, march or demonstration, participating in political discussion via the internet, and joining pressure groups (idem). Apart from asking women whether they had participated in any of these actions, they were also asked about the frequency of participation and the subjects they advocated for.

4.2.2 Independent variables

Multiple factors have been identified as independent variables. First of all, the influence of women empowerment and increased gender equality in Kurdish political parties Turkey was discussed. This was done by asking women about their involvement in Kurdish political parties in Turkey, their

knowledge about the ideals of this party, their opinion about these developments and the influence this has had on their lives. Secondly, the influence of displacement on political participation was tested. This was done by discussing the trajectory of migration and the experiences before, during and after migration. Furthermore, women were asked to reflect on their own political participation and the influence of their physical presence in the Netherlands on this behaviour. By leaving this question open, interesting results were found. Thirdly, the influence of traditional culture and religion was tested. Women were asked to what extent they identified with Kurdish culture and religion. Furthermore, they were asked about their upbringing, the role of culture, tradition and religion in their youth as well as in the present. If applicable, they were also asked about the role of these factors in the upbringing of their children. Expressions of tradition and culture are traditional songs, dances, holidays and language. Expressions of religion are praying, visiting mosques, wearing a head scarf, participating in fasting during Ramadan and following other rules as subscribed by religion. All these variables were used to determine if and to what degree culture and religion was important to them, and to what degree it influenced their ideas about as well as their involvement in politics. Finally, the influence of discrimination and prejudices was discussed. Women were asked about their experiences with these phenomena, as well as more general questions about their experiences with Dutch neighbours and people in general.

4.3 From data to analysis

All of the interviews that were conducted were recorded. Directly after conducting an interview, this recording was used to make a transcription. After completing all the interviews, I used the programme Atlas.ti to code these interviews. This was done in two steps. First, everything that was said in the interview was assigned a code using the method of open coding. The codes were a short summary of a specific sentence or paragraph. This resulted in a total of 184 codes. When this step was completed, I ordered all the codes into ten general categories. This provided me with a manageable overview of the results, which I used to structure my analysis and provide an answer to my sub- and main questions.

5. Analysis – From experience to activity

This chapter will elaborate upon the findings of this research. First, an overview will be given of the political participation of the women who participated in this study. A distinction can be made between three groups: women who primarily engage in institutionalized political participation, women who primarily engage in noninstitutionalized political participation to a significant degree, and women who primarily engage in noninstitutionalized political participation to a small degree. There is thus a difference between the type of political participation in which interviewees engaged, as well as the degree in which they participate. Distinguishing between these groups is important, as the factors that are studied in this research affect these groups differently.

After discussing the characteristics of these groups in detail, the results of the research will be presented guided by the experiences of some specific respondents. Their story will be used to illustrate the findings, and highlight trends found throughout the research. Furthermore, the three different categories of political involvement will be discussed separately in each paragraph, in order to systematically analyse the influence of each factor. In this way, all the sub-questions as they were formulated above will be answered. This will be followed by a conclusion to answer the central research question.

5.1 Categories of political participation

A large majority of the women who were interviewed engaged in political participation in the Netherlands in some form. This is in itself a striking result, as this finding contrasts with previous research on political participation of migrant women in general, and political participation of Turkish women in the Netherlands specifically. All of the women had voted in previous elections and/or had the intention to vote in the future. This contrasts with results from polls in 2006 and 2009, where only 66% of Turkish women declared to have the intention to vote (Schmeets, 2011, p. 193). Furthermore, all of the women interviewed expressed their interest in politics. This again contrasts with result from previous research, with numbers as low as 37% of Turkish women in the Netherlands who declared to be somewhat or very interested in politics (p. 191). This high level of political participation among participations of this study might have been a result of a possible selection-bias, resulting from the snow-ball method of selecting interviewees. This will be elaborated upon further below, when limitations of this study will be discussed. In any case, as this study is not quantitative, a survey of political interests of just eleven Kurdish women can certainly not be claimed to be representative for all Kurdish women in the Netherlands. What this study can and will do however, is explain the motivations behind the political interest and participation of these women.

The ways in which these women were politically active varied significantly however. Therefore, a distinction will be made between three categories of political participation.

As has been discussed above, a distinction can be made between institutionalized and noninstitutionalized political participation (Deth, 2014). Furthermore, some political actions require more investment of time, money or other resources than other forms of political participation. It is according to these two qualifications that the respondents have been put into three categories, as can be seen in Table 2. The effects of the various factors on women belonging to these categories will be structurally analysed below. To make referral to them easier, the categories have been numbered.

Category 1: Institutionalized political participation	Category 2: Significant noninstitutionalized political participation	Category 3: Little noninstitutionalized political participation
Respondent 4	Respondent 3	Respondent 1
Respondent 6	Respondent 5	Respondent 2
	Respondent 7	Respondent 8
	Respondent 11	Respondent 9
		Respondent 10

Table 2. Respondents according to category of political participation

The first category consists of the women who primarily engage in institutionalized political participation. Only two women are part of this category. Both of them are currently holding an elected political position. One woman has been a member of the Dutch Parliament for over a decade, while the other was only recently elected into the city council of a major city in the Netherlands. While their political function does not exclude them from noninstitutionalized political participation, they hold the power to influence politics directly as they are part of the system. A remarkable trait of both these women was the fact that both of them were born in the Netherlands, and thus belonged to the category of second generation migrants. This corresponds to findings in previous research, which concluded that second generation migrants are often better integrated in the Dutch society than their parents, and also show more interest in politics (Schmeets, 2011, p. 189). Other factors that have affected their political participation will be discussed below.

The second category of women consist of women who, just like the first group, show significant amounts of political participation, but mostly engage in noninstitutionalized political participation. The most common forms of political participation were organizing and participating in protests, rallies and demonstration, signing and spreading petitions and using the internet to spread political ideas and engage in political discussions. The women in this category engaged in these

activities relatively often, at least on a monthly and some even on a weekly basis. While this political activity concerned a variety of subjects, the majority of the women focused their attention on the situation in Kurdistan. For example, recently many women had participated in actions around the situation in Afrin. Other focus areas included gender equality and integration of migrants in the Dutch society, but these themes were often also connected to either Kurdish ideology or Kurds in the Netherlands. One of these women was born in the Netherlands, the others in Turkey. None of these women had experience with political participation in Turkey themselves, as all of them were between the age of seven and eleven when they migrated.

The final category of women are those who only showed a limited engagement in noninstitutionalized political participation. While all of them expressed their interests in Dutch politics and had the intention to vote in elections, they did not participate in political activities or did so only sporadically. Some women had signed petitions in the past, or participated in rallies, demonstrations or protests. A few of them had further decreased these activities recently. Only one woman expressed the intention to become more politically active in the future, after only recently arriving in the Netherlands. While the time these women had spent in the Netherlands varied, they all arrived in the Netherlands during adulthood, after having been politically active in Turkey. What factors have led to their decision to significantly decrease or even end their political participation after migrating will be discussed below.

5.2 Displacement

The first factor that will be discussed is displacement. Displacement can be defined as 'the situation in which people are forced to leave the place where they normally live' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). Most of the women who participated in this study arrived in the Netherlands as refugees, as a result of the conflict in Eastern-Turkey. A few arrived or were born here after their parents came to the Netherlands as labour migrants. Both categories of women however have similar experiences, and the motivations behind migration has little effect on the general likelihood of political participation.

The effect of displacement is complex, and different stages of the process can have various effect. For the sake of analysis, the factor of displacement will be divided in three parts: the experiences and events that led to displacement, the experiences between leaving the 'place where they normally live' and the current location of residence, and finally the experiences in the country of arrival. This chapter will go into the effects of these stages separately, showing their effects on the women belonging to different categories of political participation as defined above.

5.2.1 Conflict induced displacement

For many of the women, the decision to migrate to the Netherlands was a response to violent conflict and oppression in Turkey. Multiple women experienced the effects of this conflict directly, others encountered it in a more limited sense before coming to the Netherlands as a child. Second generation migrant women never experienced the conflict themselves, but a number of them were still influenced by the experiences of their parents. This section will specify the effects of conflict as a motivation for displacement on the political activity of these women in the Netherlands. It will be argued that for second generation women, or women who arrived in the Netherlands at a young age, their limited experience with conflict can function as a motivation to become politically active. Women who have extensive experience with violent conflict and state oppression however, are deterred from political participation by their negative experiences.

Both of the women involved in significant levels of institutionalized political participation, who are currently holding political office, were born in the Netherlands. They have thus never experienced displacement themselves. They did however hear about the experiences of their parents. For these women, the experience of displacement of their parents has not had a major effect on their political activity. If anything, it has raised their interest in situations of injustice in Turkey specifically and the world in general. As previous research has shown, psychological engagement in politics often leads to political activity (e.g. Verba et al., 1995). This was also the case for these women. The experience of displacement of parents can thus be a small, but positive contribution to political activity by sparking interest in specific political subjects.

For one of these women, hearing about the experience of her parents did influence her somewhat. Her father had been forced to escape Turkey due to his political activity during his study and could see how these events had affected the lives of her parents. This effect was however significantly less on her own life.

Look, for me it is different because I was born and raised here, my life is here. My family is here, my friends are here. My work is here, by ambitions lie here. The injustice that takes place there, I am concerned about that, but other than that my life is here so I am in different position than they are (R4).

For this woman, the experiences of her parents have thus for her resulted in an increased interest in the situation in their country of origin. Especially the injustice that is done in Turkey concerns her. As she formulates in the quote however, the experience of displacement of her parents has significantly less influence on her compared to her parents. As she was born here, she was able to build her life here without major obstacles resulting from the history of migration of her parents.

Many of the women involved in significant levels of noninstitutionalized political participation had a similar experience. The majority of these women was born in Turkey and spent the first years of their lives there, but arrived in the Netherlands at a young age. Some of them did have some experience with the consequences of conflict. For many women, these experiences led to an interest in the situation in Turkey, which led them to become politically active on this subject. The events that led to displacement thus eventually contributed to political participation. One of these women is Ala³. She was born in East-Turkey, in a village with mostly Kurdish-Alevite people. Despite her young age at the time, she remembers being afraid of the 'outside world'. Expressions of tradition and religion had to be done in secret. Sometimes her mother told her stories about the Kurds. Her mother was however careful to avoid talking about politics, even after arriving in the Netherlands. The conflict in Turkey between Kurds and the Turkish state has thus influenced the life of Ala from an early age. While she might not have fully understood the situation, she did experience oppression and fear during her life in Turkey.

For Ala however, this did not withhold her from participating in politics. Like the women in the first category, her experiences sparked an interest in the injustice that continues to exist in Turkey. This interest led to political participation, to attempt to improve the situation for Kurds living in Turkey.

Look, it was not so much the Kurdish identity, right. Being Kurdish, that is not it. At one point it is about, if you see, in your country of origin that people are dying, and that people are oppressed. That is more, that has become a question of conscious (R11).

As Ala explains here, engaging in political activities to aid those people that are dying and being oppressed is a question of conscious for her. Her experience with the conflict during her young years were a starting point of her interest in this subject that eventually led to political participation. In this way, the experiences that led to displacement have thus motivated her to become politically active.

While Ala has become politically active in a variety of ways, her parents have continued to avoid politics. Since she was little, they have warned her for the dangers of political involvement. Apart from some stories her mother told her, where she was careful to avoid talking about politics, anything to do with Kurdistan was taboo. While this is an extreme example, this fear that exists among the first generation of Kurds is a theme that often recurred during this research. Like the parents of Ala, many of the women in the third category of political participation, who experienced

³ Real name is known to the author.

the suppression of the Turkish state, stopped being politically active after migrating to the Netherlands. For them, experiences that led to displacement had a negative effect on their political participation in the Netherlands. Fear, trauma as well as disillusion with politics are the main reasons for this change in behavior that occurred after displacement.

Of the women who migrated to the Netherlands at an older age, only a few were politically active and when they were, only to a very limited extent. They would for example cast their vote in elections, and occasionally sign petitions, but were not involved in other activities. This is striking, as all of these women had been politically active in Turkey to a significant degree. One woman was even elected as mayor, but had no inclination to undertake any politics-related action in the Netherlands apart from voting in elections. Do the issues that motivated them before, no longer interest them now they are not confronted with them up close? This is certainly not the case. The empowerment these women experienced by being able to participate in the Kurdish political party in Turkey and the continuing interest in the situation in Turkey, they never involved themselves in politics in the Netherlands because of their previous experiences. Many of the women who were politically active in Turkey faced oppression, violence and some were put in jail.

But I came here because of the dangerous things. And I am really fed up with politics. What I saw there, that is enough for me. I cannot carry so heavy. It was really hard for me. And things I saw in the political party, all the politics that I saw I think I are not very pretty (R8, translated from Dutch to English).

This attitude was expressed by a number of women who had been politically active in Turkey. Their experiences with politics in Turkey were very negative, and this has translated itself in a general rejection of politics. As the oppression these women experienced was a result of policy of the Turkish state, these women associate politics with oppression and war and thus do not want to be involved in this anymore. Another factor that is closely related to this rejection of politics, is the experience of trauma. The negative experiences have often had a great effect on the psychological state of the women. This is expressed in the quote above when she says how hard it was what she has seen and experienced. Many women carry their fear that resulted from their experiences with them to the Netherlands. When asked if she had ever joined protests or signed petition one woman said the following:

I have a very fearful life in the Netherlands. I do not dare to these things and I really need to rest because I had a very difficult life. That is why I am not involved in these things (R2, translated from Dutch to English).

This woman is thus clearly held back by her fear, and the trauma she still experiences as a result of her experiences when engaging in politics in Turkey. Despite freedom and security that exist in the Netherlands, she is still affected by these past experiences. This was something that was experienced by a number of the women who had been politically active in Turkey. Specific experiences differed, and many of the women were reserved when talking about this, but it became clear that many suffered from psychological problems or trauma. As much of this resulted from activities related to politics, many of these women were no longer interested in becoming politically active after their arrival in the Netherlands. As the conflict continues in Turkey however, trauma was often triggered again when reports of suffering reached them. This placed women in the difficult situation of deeply caring about these horrible events and wanting to change the situation, but also having an aversion to politics. This led some of the women to get involved in humanitarian activities, that aid victims of the conflict without getting involved in politics.

Involvement in politics in Turkey for these women thus has had a negative effect on their involvement in politics in the Netherlands. Despite their empowerment and acquired knowledge and skills, the women rarely participate in politics in the Netherlands because of the negative experiences they had in Turkey. Many of them suffered from psychological problems and trauma after they encountered the oppression of the Turkish state. Others also feel like the suffering they saw and experienced was a result of politics, and thus developed an aversion to this subject. All these factors have led these women to refrain from political participation in the Netherlands.

5.2.2 Between here and there

Between the experiences in the country of origin and the arrival in the Netherlands lies the actual act of migrating. This can be a traumatic event, causing psychological damage to those involved. As has been elaborated upon above, trauma is an important factor for many of the respondents of this study to end their political participation. The actual process of migrating can contribute to this negative effect on political participation by inflicting trauma.

The interviewees who were involved in institutionalized political participation to a significant degree were both born in the Netherlands, and thus has no direct personal experience with migration. Only the women in category two and three, who are involved in noninstitutionalized political participation to either a great or small degree, personally experienced the event of (forced) migration. While this might have affected the wellbeing of some of these women, especially those who were forced to relocate due to conflict, this had little effect on their political activity in the Netherlands. There was one woman however, who had a specifically negative experience when she

migrated from Turkey to the Netherlands. After experiencing traumatic events in Turkey, she applied for asylum in the Netherlands together with her husband and son. Before they were granted asylum recently however, they were forced to stay in a number of centres for asylum seekers for six years. These years of insecurity about being allowed to stay in the Netherlands and the lack of a permanent home added to the previous trauma. As this woman has recently been granted asylum and has moved into a home with her family, she can now try to work on her recovery. She expressed the desire to live a quiet life and finally take some rest. While this woman had been politically active in Turkey and has shown interest in Dutch politics, she is psychologically not able to undertake any political activities in the Netherlands. In this case, the experience of displacement has thus contributed to trauma that prevents this woman from participating in politics.

Met opmerkingen [a1]: ?

5.2.3 Getting used to Dutch society

The final stage of displacement is the arrival in, in this case, the Netherlands. The presence in a new society has a number of effects. There are two factors related to the presence in the Dutch society that have affected the political participation of these Kurdish women. First of all, the arrival in the Netherlands meant getting used to a new society, language and culture. All these factors, and especially the lack of knowledge of the Dutch language proved to be an obstacle to political participation of Kurdish women. When these obstacles can be overcome however, the political freedom and ideas of gender equality present in Dutch society positively affected the political participation of the women.

As both of the women involved in institutionalized political participation to a great degree were born in the Netherlands, they did not experience the difficulties of adapting to the Dutch society. The majority of the women involved with noninstitutionalized political participation to a small or great degree however did experience these issues. An important obstacle experienced by many women was the lack of knowledge of the Dutch language. The importance of language was brought forward by a woman who arrived in the Netherlands only last year.

I do watch television. It is very important for the development of my language. I also would like to know what is happening around me and in the country. And I watch television, I follow it, but I don't understand it yet. So I do not know yet, for example I see a politician on television, but I do not know who it is an what, which ideology they use or promote (R9, translated from Dutch to English).

While the motivation to be informed about politics is present, it is not yet possible for this woman to understand the Dutch language and engage with the information she tries to gain. Language is thus

essential for political participation in the Netherlands. It is the first step to becoming informed and gaining knowledge about the system, political parties and possibilities for participation in politics in the Netherlands. This is true for institutionalized political participation, but also for noninstitutionalized political participation. The women who are currently investing considerable time in noninstitutionalized political participation are mostly active on the issue of Kurdistan, but most of their efforts are directed at Dutch and European politics. Demonstrations and petitions are often directed at the Dutch parliament and other political representatives.⁴ The aim is to find support for these actions from as many people as possible, not just Kurds living in the Netherlands. To reach the Dutch electorate and politicians on any issue, mastering the Dutch language is thus essential.

Despite the initial difficulties of adapting to the Dutch culture and language, a majority of the women managed to overcome these obstacles.

And after I arrived here, the first period I found a bit difficult. With a different language, different culture, different environment. No friends, and these kind of things were a bit difficult. But I was able to adapt really quickly. Because, that culture, the Dutch culture, actually after I experienced Netherlands, got to know it, I also noticed myself that the, a part of the culture was inside me. And I have every time, I noticed that the culture that I grew up with was not free for me (R10, translated from Dutch to English).

Just like Ala, this women had some difficulty adjusting to the circumstances in the Netherlands. Again, language is raised as a problem. This woman was however able to overcome these initial difficulties, and actually noticed some things about Dutch culture that gave her more freedom. The experience of displacement thus initially proved to be an obstacle to political participation for many women, but can eventually also result in the gaining of increased freedom.

Ala, as well as many of the participants of this study, did also experience this freedom in the Netherlands. She was able to develop her interest in politics, that was triggered by her experiences in Turkey as discussed above, by reading about politics. The Dutch context which allows women the freedom to study and participate in politics provided her with the opportunity to become politically active. While it is of course impossible to know how Ala would have developed if she had stayed in

⁴ Examples are petitions calling for the release of political representative s of the HDP and a call to politicians to end their silence about Afrin:

<https://www.petities24.com/petitie-voor-vrijlating-van-gekozen-volksvertegenwoordigers-van-de-hdp-in-turkije>

and

<https://www.petities24.com/oproep-aan-onze-politici-doorbreek-het-stilzwijgen-rond-afrin?wh>

Turkey, she expects that she would have been in jail had been politically active in the way she is now. Some of the women who have been politically active in Turkey were indeed put in jail, so this fear seems quite legitimate. Apart from the fear of being arrested, other obstructions to being politically active were present in Turkey that ceased to exist when women migrated to the Netherlands.

I feel a bit thankful to the Netherlands. (...) And we could, they offered us an opportunity. To start with a new life. Here we have a good, all of us have good life, a safe life here. And we could, we could develop ourselves. We had the opportunity to develop ourselves. And we actually get all the opportunities here (R10, translated from Dutch to English).

The Dutch, I think it is good that we are here in the Netherlands because we actually got the chance to open our eyes and think. From the Western culture anyway, we have, I have seen a lot of things that I think, oh, we have this too, we do this in our way, but the Western people do it that way, and that way is actually a lot better. So then I actually incorporate that. So yes, that has had a lot of influence on the person that I actually want to be, let's say. And I don't think that would have been possible if I had stayed in Kurdistan (R5, translated from Dutch to English).

These quotes show a variety of factors that allowed women to develop themselves in a way that was not possible in Turkey, or would have been more difficult in Turkey. The first quote comes from a woman who arrived in the Netherlands after (noninstitutionalized) political participation in Turkey. She fled to the Netherlands after the police threatened to put her in jail. Being free of oppression and fear of prosecution is thus an important factor for her that allowed her to develop her knowledge in general and about politics specifically. Another factor that is implicitly present in both quotes and came forward in other parts of the interviews as well is the influence of traditional culture and religion. Many of the women who were politically active in Turkey experienced opposition from people in their environment, as women were traditionally supposed to stay at home and raise children. With the development of the ideology PKK and pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey, as discussed in the chapter on the historical context, this changed to a certain extent. The influence of these ideas will be discussed in more detail below, when the influence of the Kurdish ideology will be addressed. These traditional norms and values are however not a part of Dutch society, which allowed these women to act without being obstructed by them. Ala used this opportunity to become politically active, as did many of the other women who participated in this study.

Despite initial barriers such as insufficient knowledge of the Dutch language, culture and society, which make political participation in this first phase nearly impossible, many women experience their presence in the Netherlands as contributing to their ability to develop themselves.

Part of this development is their ability to participate in politics, which would have been more difficult if they had stayed in Turkey, due to oppression by the Turkish state and traditional norms and values which discourage women from participating in politics. Migration to the Netherlands has thus created a situation that positively affected political participation of many of the Kurdish women, due to the political freedom and prevailing norms about women that are present in Netherlands.

5.3 From an empowerment ideology to political participation in reality

In Turkey, a development of increased gender equality and female empowerment can be noticed in Kurdish political parties. An important driving factor behind this development is the leftist ideology of these parties. The ideology of the Kurdish movement can be described as inclusive, pro-equality and sensitive to women's rights (Sahin-Mencutek, 2016, p. 478). Emancipation of women is an important part of this, and liberation of women is often connected to the liberation of the Kurdish people as a whole, where the one cannot be achieved without the other. Many of the Kurdish women in the Netherlands were influenced by these ideas, and some actively support them. Awareness of these ideas positively affected their political participation. This was reinforced by the promotion of these ideals by Kurdish associations in the Netherlands. Formal networks are a known factor of influence on political participation, and the combination of the Kurdish ideology and the formal networks provided as specifically accommodating setting for political participation of Kurdish women.

For the women involved in institutionalized political participation to a great degree, the ideology of Kurdish political parties in Turkey did not affect them significantly. Involvement with formal networks such as left-oriented Turkish organizations or Kurdish associations was however an influential factor that positively contributed to political participation. One of the women had one of her first experiences with politics through Kurdish organizations, left-oriented Turkish organizations and especially women's groups. Here, the egalitarian and maybe even feminist ideology of the Kurdish organization did play a role, as this provided the basis for female activism and representatives within the organization. This woman first got involved with the association when they asked her to use her expertise to provide information and advice on issues such as healthcare, welfare and the legal system.

Apart from this, I also have a representing role, that came out of it. That I, well, that I represented them to the outside world. Towards authorities such as the municipality, even politics. That I appeal on behalf of women, say, they gave me a mandate to act and ask for things on their behalf. Or to put important issues, say, on the agenda (R4, translated from Dutch to English).

Organizations such as the Kurdish association and left-oriented Turkish organizations provided the opportunity to gain experience with institutionalized political participation. In this case, it was not her intention to become a representative of the interests of women towards authorities, but due to her knowledge and position was asked to do this. This allowed her to develop both knowledge and skills of the political system, and through a combination of factors eventually decided to join a political party and run for office in the municipal council. The importance of gaining experience through local organizations was also highlighted by a member of the Dutch parliament. While she was never active in Kurdish organizations, she also used to be active in a Turkish labour organization before joining the peace-movement and a student union.

For women involved in noninstitutionalized political participation to a great degree, the ideology of Kurdish political parties in Turkey was an even more influential factor than for the first group. An example how awareness of this ideology can lead to political participation was given by Ala. Experience with, as well as knowledge of the inequalities and oppression of Kurds in Turkey was an important motivation for Ala to become politically active on this subject. Kurdish identity as such does not have such a strong resonance for her, as she is mostly interested in equality and freedom for all, be it Kurds, Arabs, Turkish or Dutch people. This is an attitude that was expressed by many of the interviewees. While, just like Ala, most women developed basic ideas of equality early in life, many of them were also inspired by the ideas that are promoted by the pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey, currently mostly represented by the HDP, as well as the Kurdish organizations in the Netherlands. Awareness of these ideas was a motivation to become politically active for many of the women.

In an attempt to reconnect with the Kurdish culture, as well as to find an opportunity to participate in the Dutch society, Ala joined organizations by and for (Kurdish) migrants. A number of Kurdish organizations exist in the Netherlands, and many of the women interviewed knew about them and were in some way involved with such an organization or had been in the past. Ala joined the Kurdish organization not long after arriving in the Netherlands, and has been active since. Currently, she is part of the women's council of the Kurdish organization. This is a council constituted of only women, aimed at promoting the interests of women within the organization as well as outside it. Through sub-committees activities aimed at a variety of goals are organized. Examples are cultural activities such as Kurdish language courses or Kurdish traditional dance lessons, but also meetings to raise awareness and provide education on issues such as gender equality and sexual diversity.

For Ala, the women's council of the Kurdish organization is currently the primary channel for her political participation. Through the organization a variety of political activities are organized, such

as protests and debates with (local) politicians. The vast majority of these activities concern the conflict with Turkey, such as the invasion of Afrin by the Turkish army. The choice of prioritizing this subject is felt to be a necessity by Ala, as it is for many of the women. Other issues, such as the integration of Kurdish women in the Dutch society, gender equality within the Kurdish association as well as in the Netherlands in general and education and employment opportunities for the youth are all subjects that were raised as subjects deserving attention within the Kurdish association. So far, however, these issues have not been addressed extensively. The primary reason why little activities are organized around these issues however is the lack of resources and time, as these are already dedicated to raising awareness about the conflict in Turkey.

Our family lives there, our, let's say, our friends live there. So now we are busy with, at the moment, how can we make sure there will be peace there. That is what keeps us occupied. While here in the Netherlands there is also a lot to do still, right. The participation of women, equality. On like, a lot of areas there is a lot to be done concerning Dutch women and Kurdish women here in the Netherlands. But our priority now is to ensure that there will be peace there. That our friends and family can live there safely (R11, translated from Dutch to English).

As this quote illustrates, many women are thus aware of the importance of other political issues apart from the conflict in Turkey. Due to the personal connection to this issue however, as well as the urgency of the situation most energy is directed at this problem.

While many women prioritize the Kurdish issue, this does not mean that none of them are politically involved on other subjects. This is also true for Ala. While most of her efforts are currently directed towards the aim of ensuring peace in Kurdistan, she does sign petitions on issues such as animal welfare. Furthermore, all of the women who had the possibility to vote in the Netherlands did so. Even many of the women who had not yet been able to cast their vote were informed about Dutch politics and had ideas about parties they would vote for or ideas about their interest they wanted to see represented.

While Ala developed her knowledge on the Kurdish history, conflict and ideology by reading a variety of books and authors, some of the women were specifically inspired by the ideas of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. One of the women, coming from a traditional family where men were considered superior to women, experienced the reading of books by Öcalan as an eye-opening experience. While she had personal experience with the different treatment that boys and girls received, she never considered this to be problematic. This changed when she learned about gender equality and realized that women should be treated equally and receive the same opportunities as men.

Like Ala, this woman decided to become active in the Kurdish association, through which she participates in a variety of political activities. The ideas of gender equality that are put forward in the Kurdish ideology are an important issue in this association. Like in the Turkish-Kurdish political party, the specific aim of involving women allows women to become active in the association on all levels. In this way the Kurdish ideology within these organizations creates opportunities for women to participate. Beyond these opportunities, the association aims at educating women on the importance of gender equality through initiatives such as those organized by the women's council. Ala is one of the many of women who actively try to contribute to promoting these ideals. It is because of these ideals that she has become so active.

And then, also because the organization, the Kurdish organization but also the ideas behind it, not just for women but also for people with a different sexual orientation. That equality applied to everyone, also not just Kurds. And well, I just felt at home there. That I thought, yes that is how I am, I agree, I feel the same way. So that is how I became active, and still are active within the boards (R11, translated from Dutch to English).

This quote clearly demonstrates that her activity within the Kurdish organization, and the political participation that takes place through this organization is strongly motivated by the ideals of equality that are promoted. Like for many women, it goes beyond the question of just women or just Kurds for Ala and rather applies to everyone.

The Kurdish ideology, and especially the ideas of gender equality as well as equality in general thus is an important factor in the political activity of women. Because they learn about these ideas and find that they agree with them, they are motivated to take action to promote these ideas. Theoretically these ideals are universal, and thus provide ample ground to become active within Dutch politics. As has been discussed above however, for many women their activities are focused on the conflict in Turkey because of limited time and resources. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that the ideology motivating their political activity is not limited to this subject.

The women who only sporadically participated in noninstitutionalized political participation arrived in the Netherlands as adults, and had participated in activities of the Turkish-Kurdish political party HDP in Turkey. These activities varied from joining in gatherings, spreading awareness about the ideas of the party and showing people how they can vote, to being elected as mayor. It was because of the specific aim to include women in the political activities of the HDP that these women gained the opportunity to become politically active.

A Lioness is Also a Lion
A case study of the political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands

In the past it was not so self-evident that Kurdish women went out onto the streets. But the Kurdish political party has worked hard on this for years. They brought forth a lot of female members and at one point it has become normal (R1, translated from Dutch to English).

Of course just the possibility of joining a political party does not fully explain why these women choose to become active in this party. This is where the ideology of the party plays a big role. What has motivated many of the women to become active were the ideas of the party about the liberation of women from patriarchal domination that has been present in society for hundreds of years. The women who grew up in Kurdistan personally experienced this inequality. ‘When I was young, I saw in our tradition and in our culture, the woman is not as free as men. I think that is not fair (R8).’

The spreading of the ideas of gender equality among many Kurds in Turkey started with the rise of the PKK. As mentioned in the chapter on historical context, the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan published a number of books discussing his ideas about politics and society. In these books, the issues of the suppression and liberation of women is an important subject. While these books were not accessible to the women while they were in Turkey, these ideas did reach them. One woman learned about the ideas of the Kurdish political parties in Turkey by corresponding through letters with members of the party who were in jail. Another had direct experience with the ideas of the PKK when they were active in the region where she lived.

I remember it very well, it was 1986, I was a very young girl. My uncle said: “I do not understand, what are those women doing among them? Why do women have to fight?” That were the thoughts of my uncle, but my aunts, female cousins were all admiring them. “Gee, women are also fighting, women are also going to battle, how nice, how cool, how admirable.” And in no-time there were other women from our village who joined the PKK and went to fight the Turkish army (R1, translated from Dutch to English).

This example shows how women in Turkey were affected by the ideas and actions of the PKK, and some were even inspired to join the fight themselves. While men, like the uncle in this quote, might have their reservations about these developments, women formed their own ideas about it. This inspired them to think more about gender equality, and empowered them to become active themselves. This was also the case for the women participating in this research, who became politically active in the variety of ways as explained above. These findings correspond to findings from previous research, which concluded that the ideology of Kurdish political parties played an important role in empowering Kurdish women to become politically active in Turkey (Sahin-Mencutek, 2016). Many of these women are however no longer politically active, or are active to a

significantly lesser degree in the Netherlands. This is a result of some of the other factors, as discussed above. For some women, this is a result of their recent arrival and difficulties with adapting to the Dutch context. For many of the other women however, it is a result of experiences they had when participating in politics in Turkey.

The Kurdish ideology thus has the potential to contribute to integration and political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. By promoting ideals of gender equality and female empowerment, Kurdish women are inspired to become politically active. As this ideology is primarily focused on Kurdistan, political activity of many of these women is aimed at improving the situation in Kurdistan. While these women are also motivated to participate in politics on other subjects, they perceive this subject to be the most urgent, and most deserving of their energy and attention. Other subjects are also deemed important, there is simply not enough time to dedicate to these issues.

The positive effect of the Kurdish ideology on political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands is reinforced by the promotion of these ideas by Kurdish organizations in the Netherlands. What makes Kurdish organizations in the Netherlands especially interesting in the context of political participation of women are the rules they have with regard to their organization. As was discussed above, every Kurdish association in the Netherlands has a separate women's council that promotes the interests of women within the organization as well as outside it. Apart from this, they also use a system of dual leadership, where the position of president of the general board is shared by a man and a woman. Women thus have ample opportunity to participate in Kurdish associations on all levels, and can gain leadership skills as well as experience and knowledge about the Dutch political system.

5.4 Tradition and religion

Judging by the results of this study, upbringing and the influence of tradition and religion seems not to affect the likelihood of political participation of Kurdish women, as both women who received a liberal upbringing as well as those who were raised with more traditional ideas ended up becoming politically active in the Netherlands. What might be an influential factor here, is that all of the interviewees were either no longer religious, or had their own interpretation of religion that allowed them to incorporate their ideas about gender equality. Results might have been different if an interview with a strongly religious woman could have been included.

For the women interviewed in this study however, tradition and religion was neither a motivation, nor an obstacle to their political participation. This same effect can be seen across all

three categories of women. The women in the first two categories, that were involved in substantial degrees of either institutionalized or noninstitutionalized political participation did not experience cultural, traditional or religious norms and values as an obstacle to their political participation. For the women in category three, who are not politically active or only to a small degree, it was not culture, tradition or religion that prevented them from participating.

Like for many of the women who participated in this research, religion does not play a major role in the life of Ala. She was however raised with Alevism, a religious movement related to Islam. His religion has some tradition of granting more freedom to women than for example Sunni Islam, as women do not have to wear headscarves or have to part of arranged marriages. Ala however did experience that men and women were considered and treated unequal during her youth. She gives an example that came up regularly when discussing gender equality during the upbringing: girls could not go out at night, while boys were allowed to do this. While this is a small example, it illustrates the different treatment girls and boys receive when growing up, paving the way for further unequal treatment and male dominance. For Ala this upbringing however did not withhold her from becoming politically active.

This conclusion seems to be true for both women who arrived in the Netherlands at a young age and those who grew up in Turkey. Traditional norms and values were strongly present in Turkey, not only within the family but in the community. As has been discussed above, arriving in the Netherlands was experienced as liberating by some of the women due to the absence of these traditional norms and values that restricted the behavior of women. Like Ala however, many of the women this did not let this stop them from becoming politically active in Turkey. This does however not mean that it was not an obstacle that had to be faced. One woman experienced such difficulties when she started attending secondary school. It was not normal for girls in her village to receive education, and the leader of the village she lived in did not agree with this.

‘Each time after I studied (...) the leader of the village, he was bothered by us. Because of the study. And three times a day for a long time, maybe a year, around a year, three times a day he came to our house. Every morning, every afternoon, every evening. Every morning, every afternoon, his behaviour drove us crazy. He really drove me crazy. Every time he called my mother names, why are you sending your daughter? You daughter cannot do this, and that and this (R10, translated from Dutch to English).

This woman had to face abuse by the leader of the village, who did not allow girls to go to school and develop themselves. As the quote shows, his behaviour was quite extreme and had a big effect on this woman and her mother. While it was a struggle to convince her mother that she should send her

to school, eventually she could continue to go with the help of her mother. When she grew up, she went on to participate in politics in Turkey. So again, like was the case with Ala, women who were brought up with ideas that did not allow them to study and participate in politics, they found ways to do so anyway.

It is difficult to make a distinction between culture and religion when talking about upbringing of women. For the women who participated in this research however, neither of those factors prevented them from becoming politically active. Some of the women did identify as Muslim. All of them however interpreted Islam in a way that allowed them to believe in the importance of gender equality as well. Some of the women who came from relatively religious families did get some negative responses from their family. None of them however faced major difficulties with their families, and were not prevented from living the way they wanted by these family bonds.

Tradition and religion are thus factors that can pose an obstacle to the political activity of women, as the norms and values often do not allow women to be active in this way. For the women who participated in this research however, this was not such an obstacle that it was impossible to overcome. While especially the women who grew up in Turkey and were politically active there faced negative responses from the community, they went on to develop themselves and participate in politics anyway. The same is true for women who (mostly) grew up in the Netherlands and were raised by religious families. While the responses they received from their families were not always positive and encouraging, they managed to partake in political participation anyway.

5.5 Discrimination and prejudices in the Netherlands

Some of the positive effects of the circumstances in the Dutch society on political activity of Kurdish women have already been discussed above. Previous literature however has also drawn attention to the possible negative effect of prejudices and discrimination towards migrant women on their participation in the Dutch society (Ghorashi, 2010; Roggeband & Verloo, 2007). This effect was experienced by some of the women, but only to a small extent. Especially women who were active in institutionalized political activities had experience with prejudices and discrimination based on their history of migration. When a member of the Dutch parliament was asked if she had ever experienced discrimination or prejudices, she answered the following:

Prejudices for sure. But well, for me it has never been an obst... I know it is present, but it has never been an obstacle for me. So, uh, yes, personally, yes I have had some experiences but I have also had very positive experiences (R6, translated from Dutch to English).

This woman is thus aware of the existence of discrimination in the Netherlands, and has had some experience with it herself. As she says however, this has not had a significantly negative effect on her career in politics. Furthermore, she makes sure to note that she has also had many positive experiences. When asked further about it she would not go as far as saying her background was a benefit to her political career. Prejudices and discrimination as a result of her ethnic background thus do happen, but in this case do not significantly affect political participation directly. Experiences can be a motivation for political participation. As has been discussed above, the experience or observation of injustices can be a trigger to take action against it through politics.

One of the respondents, who was recently elected as a member of the municipal council in The Hague had similar experiences. While she had little experiences with discrimination herself, she did know about experiences from people around her.

Yes, so I am 40 and when I was growing up here it was not like, it was different. It was really different. I wasn't judged on the basis of my appearance or my last name or... (..) But my attitude has never been us against them. I was always, I felt a part of this society. And I have never felt discriminated for that, because I really was able to have equal opportunities, I was given them and also was able to use them (R4, translated from Dutch to English).

This woman sees discrimination around her happening especially to younger people, and feels like discrimination in the Netherlands happened less when she was growing up. While this might or might not be true, it is clear that she has very limited experience with being discriminated herself. Again, discrimination or prejudices were not a factor that significantly affected her ability or will to be politically active.

Both of the respondents thus did not experience discrimination and prejudices as an obstacle for their aspirations to participate in politics and run for office in the Netherlands. Similar experiences were expressed by women who were less politically active, or active through different channels. When asked about responses of Dutch people on political activities on the issue of Kurdistan, such as demonstrations and posting of videos on social media to raise awareness for the situation in Turkey and Syria, the respondents reported that most Dutch people responded positively. An exception here is the experience of respondents with Turkish people living in the Netherlands. Due to the conflict in Turkey between the Kurds and the Turks, nationalist Turkish people oppose pro-Kurdish activity. While this was a recurring subject in the interviews, it goes beyond the scope of this research to fully analyse the influence of the situation between Kurds and Turks in the Netherlands on Kurdish people in the Netherlands.

Apart from experiences with prejudices and discrimination on the basis of their history of migration, a subject that was discussed during the interviews were their experiences with sexism in the Netherlands. Many women were aware of the existence of gender inequality in the Netherlands. Again, there was a difference between women participating in institutionalized political participation and those active in noninstitutionalized ways. The women who fulfilled elected position in Dutch politics personally experienced discrimination and prejudices based on their gender. As with their experiences with these issues based on their history of migration however, this did not prevent them from becoming politically active and running for political office. The primary effect was an increased awareness of the importance of continued attention for gender equality.

Like the women in institutionalized politics, women who engaged in noninstitutionalized political participation were motivated to become or to stay active on issues of gender equality due to their knowledge about inequalities in the Dutch society. Many of the women gave examples where they saw instances of patriarchal attitudes or sexism in the Netherlands.

I also notice that here in the Netherlands women are inferior... Sometimes inferior to men. For example when the, when a woman walks the streets at night, then well, she could... A woman is just not, she does not feel completely safe to walk the streets late at night. And that is not good, why? Why can a man do that, and a women cannot? And that kind of thing really bothers me (R5, translated from Dutch to English).

If I look at the, well, also in the Netherlands we talk about, that men earn a lot more than women. (...) Who has made sure that we as women actually, that is decided what women do through a male ideology. The men decide what women can do well and what they cannot (R11, translated from Dutch to English).

Both these quotes illustrates how Kurdish women are aware of the inequalities that still exist in the Dutch society. While using different examples, both women problematize the fact that men are able to do things that women are not allowed or able to do. This can be related to one of the strategies for gender equality, the strategy of inclusion. Inequality is the problem, and these women try to combat this by participating and ensuring women are included in politics. The second quote goes beyond this however, by problematizing the dominance of male ideology, and how men can decide about the life of women. This can be related to the strategy of reversal, where the aim is to recognize that men and women have different interests and needs and acknowledged and respond to these difference in politics. Similar ideas were expressed in a group interview with members of a women's council of a Kurdish organization.

Why do we have a separate women's council? Well, because women have very different needs. And, well, if we would discuss these in the general board, if we would discuss it there we would not reach a lot of results. Together we decided to establish a women's council, to ensure we can realize all our needs through it (R12, translated from Dutch to English).

While in the quote above the element of the problematic dominance of men and male culture came forward, this quote addresses the idea of gender difference. Women have different needs and interests, and these need to be addressed separately from those of men. The establishment of a separate women's board might seem to contrast the simultaneous aim of integrating women. It is however motivated by a desire to reverse the previous deprivation of women and to empower them to become confident to stand up to men and not be dominated by them. Furthermore, as has been discussed above, the general board in Kurdish organizations is composed equally of men and women to ensure interests of both genders are addressed here as well.

Gender equality is thus an important subject for the women active within the Kurdish organizations, as well as for the women active in institutionalized political participation. Many of the women who were politically active through other channels also expressed their awareness of gender inequality in the Netherlands, and their desire to combat this through either political or other channels. For these women experiences and observations of existing inequalities are thus a strong motivation to become politically active. Many of the women do get this motivation from the gender inequalities they see around them in the Dutch society, while others experience the situation as satisfactory and do not feel the sense of urgency that motivates them to participate. In this way, experiences such as sexism and gender inequality can thus become a motivating factor to participate in politics.

Prejudices and discrimination in the Dutch society, both on the basis of a personal history of migration as on the basis of gender are thus not major obstacles for political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. Rather, the experience and observation of injustice and inequality in society is an important motivating factor for many of these women to participate.

5.6 Representation?

Combining the findings from all of the sub-questions allows us to analyse what forms of representation Kurdish women in the Netherlands participate in. Using the different forms of representation, as well as the strategies to establish female empowerment and gender equality, it can be concluded that the majority of the Kurdish women who were part of this study were primarily

aiming to establish substantive representation, while also being conscious of the importance of the other forms of representation.

The women who participated in this research have shown to be conscious of politics in the Netherlands, and many of them were involved in political participation in the Netherlands. The majority of the political participation that was undertaken by these women was noninstitutionalized. Many participated in protests, signed petitions and expressed their political ideas and opinions via the internet. Through these methods, they attempted to ensure substantive representation. While some of the women expressed their discontent about the small number of female representatives in Dutch or European politics, most of them were primarily concerned with the incorporation of their interests in politics. Descriptive representation was by some however also seen as necessary for substantive representation.

In a board where men are present, often the dominance of men is also present. By creating boards we want to give women more independence, that they can develop themselves more, give them that space. And indeed, women have their very different needs than what men cannot understand (R11, translated from Dutch to English).

This woman notes how the descriptive representation of women is important, as they have needs that men cannot understand and thus cannot represent women adequately. Furthermore, she even goes as far as to say that when men and women cooperate in a board, male dominance will diminish the capacity of women to develop themselves and gain influence and power. This might however be specific to the case she is talking about, namely the board of a Kurdish organization.

Both descriptive and substantive representation are of importance to the women who participate in this study, with many focusing especially on the importance of substantive representation. Within Kurdish organizations in the Netherlands, there are also measures in place to ensure a change of formalistic representation that aims at gender equality. These measures are modelled on those in place in the Kurdish political party in Turkey. Every position of power, such as the president of the general board, is shared by both a man and a woman. This is both to ensure the needs of men and women are incorporated in the policy of the organization, as to create role models that show that women are capable to fulfil such functions. While many women do see this as an example not only for Kurdish women, but for the Dutch society as a whole, none of them had the ambition to spread these forms of formalistic representation beyond the Kurdish organization. Formalistic representation thus is taken into account by many of the women, but none of them have specific wishes or ambitions to change this in Dutch politics.

Taking into account the different factors that have affected the involvement in political participation of the women who participated in this study, the majority of these women have focused on ensuring their substantive representation in Dutch politics. Some of them even specifically stated some motivations that are the basis of the strategy of reversal by problematizing male dominance and taking the different needs of men and women as a starting point. Political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands thus has the potential to bring about transformation in the political system, by attempting to change the dominant discourses present that focus on the needs of men. They attempt to increase their substantive representation by engaging in noninstitutionalized political participation, expressing their interests and needs and demanding politicians to advocate for these interests as well. Despite little descriptive representation, Kurdish women thus ensure they are substantively represented.

6. Conclusion

This research has been conducted with the aim of uncovering some of the dynamics that influence political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. This was motivated by the observation that Kurdish women in the Netherlands are part of a minority group that has been shown to have a low level of political participation. Both non-Western migrants and women are present in politics to a significantly lower degree than that they are present in Dutch society. Policy has been developed to promote participation of migrants and women in politics, but as of yet with little result. Representation of minority groups is however an important requirement of a well-functioning democracy. To effectively promote representation of migrant women in politics, it is important to understand what factors contribute to or obstruct political participation. While some research has been conducted into the social, economic and political participation of migrant women in the Netherlands and elsewhere, focus has been on women who faced a position of marginalization in their country of origin. By focusing on Kurdish women, this research contributes to debates on political participation, as well as the effects of conflict and displacement with knowledge about specific factors that affect women who have experienced empowerment and increased gender equality in the country of origin.

The results of this research can provide an analytical basis for policy to improve political participation of migrant women. This is important, as this group continues to be underrepresented in politics and incorporation of migrant women is desirable for a number of reasons. A long history of gender inequality exists, and the international community has expressed its commitment to increased incorporation of women in politics through UN resolutions, national and regional

conventions. Furthermore, a large body of research has proven the benefits of female participation in politics.

These considerations have driven the field research that has been conducted over the course of two months. Eleven in-depth interviews were conducted with Kurdish women living in different parts of the Netherlands, as well as one group interview with women who were members of the women's council of a Kurdish organization. This has provided the data to formulate an answer to the central research question:

What factors have influenced the political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands?

This question will be answered in the following chapter. First, the four sub-questions will be answered, followed by a combination of the results to answer the central question. This will be followed by a reflection on the contributions and limitations of this research. Finally, some policy recommendations that can be made based on this research will be provided for promoting political participation of migrant women in the Netherlands, and possibly in other contexts.

6.1 How political participation can (fail to) come about

In this section, the different factors as formulated in the sub-questions will be discussed. These factors were identified using existing literature on political participation in general, as well as literature on the specific topic of migrant women. Furthermore, the specific circumstance of Kurdish women in Turkey was taken into account, leading to the second sub-question. For the sake of analysis, the women who participated in this study were divided in three categories. The first category were women who engaged in institutionalized political participation by being elected as a political representative. The second category were women who engaged in noninstitutionalized political participation to a significant extent, often on subjects related to Kurdistan. Finally, the third category consisted of women who engaged in noninstitutionalized political participation, by only to a minor degree.

First, the conclusions about the effect of displacement will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of the effect of female empowerment and increased gender equality in Kurdish parties in Turkey on Kurdish women in the Netherlands. Next, the question of the effect of tradition and culture on political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands will be answered. Finally it will be discussed how prejudices and discrimination in Dutch society affect political participation of these women. Combining these factors will provide an answer to the central research question.

6.1.1 Displacement and empowerment

Previous research on the factors of displacement show both the empowering potential of displacement, as well as the possibility of reproducing patriarchal structures in diaspora communities (Ahmetbeyzade, 2007; Ayata, 2011; Gökalp, 2010; Moghissi, 1999). The results of this study have also shown both positive and negative effects of displacement. As displacement is a complex and multi-faceted concept, this factor was divided in three parts: the experiences and events that led to displacement, the experiences between leaving the 'place where they normally live' and the current location of residence, and finally the experiences in the country of arrival.

For women who were involved in either institutionalized or noninstitutionalized political participation to a significant degree, the first phase of migration had a small positive effect on their political participation. Both of the women involved in institutionalized political participation were born in the Netherlands, and thus did not experience displacement personally. The experience of their parents that led to displacement had only a minor effect on the political participation of these women. This was different for the women who were significantly involved in noninstitutionalized political participation. The majority of these women had spent a part of their youth in Turkey, and experienced the oppression of Kurds here themselves. This led to the interest in this subject later in life, as well as their political engagement. In this way, the experience of displacement contributed to political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands.

This factor however affected women who were only sporadically involved in noninstitutionalized political participation differently. Conflict and displacement had negative effects on political participation in the Netherlands of these women. Unlike in previous studies however, this was not a result of the reproduction of patriarchal structures in the diaspora community. Rather, many of the women who had been politically active in Turkey were traumatized or suffered from other psychological disorders as a result of the repression by the Turkish state. These psychological issues that made it too painful for women to participate in politics. Furthermore, many of the women were disillusioned with politics due to their experiences. Despite their political awareness and empowerment these women thus ended their political activities after migrating due to their experiences with violent conflict.

The second phase of displacement, the period between leaving the country of origin and being granted a residence permit in the country of arrival can also affect the political participation of women. While this was not a significant factor for many of the women, for one woman this process contributed to her stress and trauma. These experiences contributed to her inability to participate in Dutch politics.

Finally, the third phase of displacement is the arrival and integration in the country of arrival. Corresponding to results from previous studies, some women benefitted from the increased freedom and opportunities present in the Netherlands to develop their skills and knowledge and engage in political participation. Some women however were held back by a variety of other factors. The majority of the women had difficulties in the years after arriving in the Netherlands with adapting to the Dutch culture and society, as well as the new language which they did not speak. While most of the women overcame these initial difficulties, it was impossible for them to participate in politics in the first years after arriving in the Netherlands, while they were still experiencing the effects of these restraints.

The results of displacement can thus contribute to political participation of Kurdish women, as well as provide obstacles to their participation in Dutch politics. The difficulties of arriving in a foreign country with a different culture, society and language, as well as the consequences of experiencing violent conflict hinder women from becoming politically active. If experience with conflict is limited however, it can be a motivating factor to participate in politics. This is further stimulated by an environment of political freedom, where personal development is possible.

6.1.2 Kurdish ideology

A specific factor that influenced the political activity of Kurdish women in the Netherlands is the development of female empowerment and gender equality among the Kurdish community in Turkey. Many of the women were affected by this, either by experiencing these developments themselves while they were in Turkey, or learning about the ideology behind these developments while they were in the Netherlands.

For women who were significantly involved in either institutionalized or noninstitutionalized political participation, who grew up in the Netherlands, or arrived here at a young age, the developments of female empowerment and gender equality in the Kurdish parties in Turkey did positively affect their political participation. Many of the women were inspired by the ideology of equality present in the Kurdish parties in Turkey. Especially the ideas about gender equality resonated with many of the women, and motivated them to participate in politics. For some women, this effect was reinforced through their membership with a Kurdish organization in the Netherlands. Through these organizations, many of the women conducted especially noninstitutionalized political participation. Membership promoted political participation by providing a platform for cooperation, as well as role models that showed what can be done.

Women who were only sporadically involved in noninstitutionalized political participation had been active in Kurdish political parties in Turkey. Because of the ideology of these parties to

promote political participation of women, these women had the opportunity to become active. This ideology was also the reason they were motivated to participate, in order to promote their ideals of equality for all. Due to experienced as described above however, they did not continue this political involvement after their arrival in the Netherlands.

6.1.3 Tradition and religion

Tradition and (Islam) religion have been perceived to have a negative effect on the political participation of migrant women in the Netherlands (Ghorashi, 2010; Roggeband & Verloo, 2007). While there are a variety of religions among Kurds, a significant number of Kurds is Muslim. Furthermore, Kurdish populations in Turkey have been qualified as conservative. The gendered perceptions of men and women prescribed certain forms of behaviour, where women were excluded from position of power (Sahin-Mencutek, 2016). Most of the women who participated in this research were raised with either Sunni Islam or Alevism. While these religions have different ways in describing the relations between men and women, there were women raised with either religions that experienced some form of gender inequality during their upbringing.

For the women who grew up in Turkey and became politically active there, their religious upbringing and environment did create an obstacle to their political participation. While these women eventually did manage to participate in politics, their personal stories showed how they had to combat negative reactions from their family as well as the community they lived in. Largely due to the spread of the ideals of the Kurdish political parties in Turkey, these women managed to overcome these obstacles. After arriving in the Netherlands however, women often created their own interpretation of religion and culture. In this way, these factors did not seem to either motivate or obstruct the political participation of Kurdish women.

6.1.4 Discrimination and prejudices

In previous literature, discrimination and prejudices on the basis of a history of migration has been found to be an obstruction to the participation of migrant women in society in general (e.g. Roggeband & Verloo, 2007). This factor however had little effect on the political participation of the women in this study. Some of the women did have some experiences with these kinds of prejudices, especially those that conduct institutionalized political participation. This was however never perceived as an obstacle to their political career. Others had no experiences with discrimination. Experiences with prejudices or discrimination on another subject did occur however, namely on the basis of gender. Many of the women expressed their awareness of gender inequality in Dutch

society, and some had experience with it. Instead of hindering their activism however, this was a motivation for many women to become politically active on this subject.

Unlike results from previous studies, the data from this study did not show that prejudices and discrimination had a negative effect on political participation of migrant women. This was primarily because of little experience with such discrimination on the basis of their history of migration. Furthermore, perceived or real inequalities on the basis of gender were a factor that motivated many women to be politically active.

6.1.5 Summary

Through a case study of Kurdish women in the Netherlands, a variety of results were found that showed how certain factors can influence political participation. Some of the factors, like culture and religion, as well as prejudices and discrimination based on a history of migration did not significantly affect political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. The development of an ideology of female empowerment and gender equality in Kurdish political parties in Turkey had a positive effect on political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. While this effect was also present for women in Turkey, the women who were politically active in Turkey and afterwards arrived in the Netherlands were significantly less politically active. This was a result of the negative experiences they had in Turkey. The experience of conflict is thus a factor that can have a great effect on political participation. Connected to this factor is displacement. Apart from the women who stopped being politically active in the Netherlands, women who did not experience traumatizing events in Turkey also experienced displacement as an obstacle to participation in society initially. Due to the different language and culture, it was very difficult to participate in political activities. Many of the women overcame these initial difficulties however, and experienced how displacement can also be empowering. Due to the lack of obstacles such as traditional norms and values, as well as an oppressive state as was present in Turkey, women were empowered to develop themselves and become politically active in the Netherlands.

The factors that contributed to political participation, such as the Kurdish ideology and the increased freedom in Dutch society, have led to an increase of substantive representation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. These factors had the biggest effect on the group of women that dedicated a significant amount of their time and energy to noninstitutional political participation. These women who were motivated to become politically active did so because they wanted to generate attention for certain issues, often the conflict between Turkey and the Kurds. Descriptive, symbolic or formalistic representation was not of great importance to them, as they wanted their interest represented. This could be done by anyone, and there was no ambition to change the

political system. For the women who are currently holding political office, the factors identified in this research, either positive or negative, had a smaller effect on their political activity and were primarily motivated by their interest in the improvement of Dutch society. Finally, for the group of women who only engaged in noninstitutional political participation to a small degree, the political participation that they did undertake was also mostly aimed at substantive representation. Despite the reservations they had to participate in politics, most of these women did think it was important to have their interests represented. It is thus substantive representation that is mostly affected by the factors identified in this research.

6.2 Discussion, limitations and research recommendations

This research has provided some insights on the motivations and limitations behind the political participation of Kurdish women in the Netherlands. Especially the insights in the trajectories in which displacement can affect political participation have been striking. Previous literature has drawn attention to the ways in which migration can either liberate women from patriarchal structures, or reproduce these structures abroad (e.g. Ahmetbeyzade, 2007; Ayata, 2011; Gökalp, 2010). This study has confirmed some of these findings, but has also introduced another dimension of displacement: the effect trauma in general, and disillusionment with politics specifically. Previous experience with politics have shown to greatly affect the decision to participate in politics in the future. If these experiences are negative, women are strongly discouraged to participate in politics again. This is not an effect of displacement itself, but rather a result of the experiences that have led to displacement.

The extent to which these findings of this research can be generalized is hampered by some of the limitations of this research. First of all, it is just a single case study with a very specific focus. This research only looked at Kurdish women in the Netherlands, and it is thus difficult to say to what extent these results will also apply to other migrant women in the Netherlands, or even migrant women abroad. This choice of this case study was however motivated by the development of female empowerment and increased gender equality in the Kurdish political parties in Turkey. This unique situation of empowerment set this case apart from other studies on migrant women, which looked at women coming from a situation of marginalization. While this case might be unique, the mechanisms that promote political participation of women coming from a position of empowerment might also be useful to promote political participation of marginalized women. Furthermore, obstacles faced by women coming from a position of empowerment could also be present for marginalized migrant women in the Netherlands. While further research is needed to confirm these hypotheses, this research has made a first contribution by uncovering some of the factors that either contribute to or hinder political participation of migrant women.

Apart from the limitation of a single case study, a limitation of this study is the limited amount of interviews that were conducted, as well as the selection of interviewees that participated. Due to the timeframe of this research, only eleven one-on-one interviews were conducted and one group interview was held. All of these women expressed their interest in Dutch politics, which seems to be exceptional when this is compared with numbers on political interest of Turkish women in the Netherlands (Schmeets, 2011, p. 191). Furthermore, none of the participants of this study qualified themselves as strongly religious, which could have affected the conclusions about the influence of the factor 'tradition and religion' on the political participation of these women. The sample of women that participated in this research can thus in no way represent all Kurdish women in the Netherlands. The women who participated in this research did come from a variety of places in the Netherlands, arrived in the Netherlands at different times and had a variety of ways to participate in politics. This diversity of experiences contributed to the quality of this research, by providing a diverse set of data from which some core trends could still be extracted. A larger sample of women could however have provided a stronger basis for the analysis.

To tackle some of the limitations that were encountered during this research, as well as to explore more fully the subject of political participation of migrant women, future research will be necessary. A first recommendation would be to conduct comparative case study research into political participation of migrant women, based on their background. As has been shown in this research, the specific experiences of Kurdish women, related to their ethnic background, as well as the situation in their country of origin have significantly affected their political activity in the Netherlands. In such a comparative case study research, the political participation of women of different backgrounds could be related to their ethnic identification, as well as the situation in their country of origin. This would provide insights that can build on the results from this study, and compare the findings across cases.

Furthermore, building on the findings of this case, future research could look into the relation between political activity on a specific subject and political participation on more general or different issues. Kurdish women in the Netherlands often participated in political activities concerning the situation of Kurds in Turkey or elsewhere in the Middle East. While these women had a wider political consciousness, and also voted in elections based on their views on a variety of issues, further political activity on other subjects often remained limited. Future research might be able to find a connection between political participation on specific as opposed to more general or varied issues.

6.3 Policy recommendations

As scholars have previously argued, policy to promote social, economic and political participation of migrant women should not be based on cultural change (Ghorashi, 2010; Roggeband & Verloo, 2007). This finding can be confirmed with the results of this study, which found that culture and religion had no significant effect on political participation of Kurdish women. Looking at the factors that did influence this political participation, we can recommend that policy aimed at increased participation of migrant women could be aimed at local organizations with an inclusive ideology. As has been theorized about before, formal networks have a great potential to contribute to political participation of its members. Using the potential of these organizations to specifically work with women might promote the involvement of migrant women in the Dutch politics. Furthermore, trauma and disillusion with politics, as a result of the experience of conflict is a factor that has a great negative effect on the political participation of women who participated in this study. This finding shows the importance of providing migrants with sufficient mental health care. Furthermore, providing information about the moral codes on which Dutch politics is based, as well as taking consistent moral positions in international affairs might decrease the disillusionment of some migrants with politics, and increase their trust in Dutch politics.

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