

Interview

# **First female co-mayor of Diyarbakir: Kurdish women's battle continues against state and patriarchy**

Friday 26 August 2016, by [Al-ALI Nadjé](#), [KIŞANAK Gültan](#), [TAS Latif](#) (Date first published: 12 August 2016).

**After this military coup, the government may use this as an excuse to strengthen their sexist, militarist and anti-democratic policies further. We face this danger now.**

## ***The authors write:***

*The prominence of Kurdish women in Rojava (western Kurdistan/northern Syria) inspired us initially to understand the historical role of women in the Kurdish political movement. We were also interested in the role of Kurdish women in challenging traditional patriarchal society and rules. As part of this wider project, we wanted to hear the thoughts of Gültan Kışanak, the female co-mayor of Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish city in southeastern Turkey.*

She has been a long-term activist in the Kurdish women's movement in addition to being a former MP for the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). Ms Kışanak was imprisoned as a student after the military coup in 1980, and as a woman's rights activist and Kurdish politician has witnessed the violent aftermath of previous coups as well as the radically changing political landscape over the past decades.

Given the recent developments in Turkey, we were also eager to enquire about the recent failed coup, particularly in relation to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, prospects for peace and gendered implications of recent developments.

**Nadjé Al-Ali (NA) and Latif Tas (LT): Based on your own experiences, could you tell us about the history of women's roles within the Kurdish political movement?**

Gültan Kışanak (GK): Since the beginning of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey, women have taken active and important roles. However, we should accept that in the 1970s and 1980s women's rights were sacrificed for the sake of general political and national aims. The slogan was to first have a revolution and then make some improvements in women's rights and gender equality. This idea was not only part of Kurdish independence movements, but it was also followed by Turkish and other leftist and democratic groups who wanted to change the regime of their countries.

A few select women were given some positions to further wider political aims but they were also forced to postpone any initiatives focusing on their own rights for the sake of the national and political revolution. Key roles for women were not taken by women themselves, but 'given' by a male-dominated political leadership. After any success or political achievement, women were easily forgotten and forced back into the home to continue in their 'traditional' roles. Sadly, this has been the destiny of women in almost all countries and many contexts throughout history.

**NA, LT: Was this trend also evident within Kurdish political ideology?**

GK: In the beginning, the Kurdish movement was also influenced by this tradition. Our main aim was to promote national aims and a revolution. The movement had to show a strong and tough 'male' face if we were going to have any success with these political aims. Most of our male friends and comrades came from this old, patriarchal tradition. Patriarchal structures, even including many progressive leftist movements, did not want to change their position and include any real focus on women and their rights. But after a while, we, in the Kurdish political movement, began to strongly and continuously question - and we still question - this perspective.

Especially in the 1980s and 1990s, the issue of women's rights became important internationally, and we benefited from this trend. We started not just questioning the position of the state and the regime but also challenged the role of patriarchal structures. We started believing and supporting the idea that if there was going to be a real, sustainable and positive change then this should include women's rights from the beginning and at all levels. Without real democratization and inclusion of all minority rights, especially women's rights, any new model will not be much better or substantially different from the old one.

So we started to prioritize changes in democratic rights. This has become more important for us than the creation of an independent state. Within this new environment, women began to assume important roles and created their own separate branches, not just following what the general political movement says, but also creating alternative policies, which the party must follow. This change is not just limited to the political elements within the movement, but also includes societal changes. It has influenced all levels of the Kurdish movement. These changes were not easy and the rights were not just given by men: Kurdish women have fought at all levels and achieved these changes despite barriers within patriarchal society and despite the resistance of some of our male comrades.

**NA,LT: Give us more details about the kind of changes Kurdish women have achieved and what kind of positions and roles they have gained?**

GK: When society needs to make sacrifices in difficult times, like conflict and war, male-dominated societies may establish some new roles for women, including for women to sacrifice their lives. But after all these difficult times, the same people suddenly forget their promises to women. Similar to today, the 1990s were especially difficult for the Kurdish movement. The state was oppressive and applied considerable pressure. Women experienced those difficulties and paid a huge price. Women organized and led many demonstrations against state brutality in villages and towns. Many of our female and male friends were arrested, tortured and killed. They had to defend themselves during their trials. They read and researched about their rights. Women not only learnt about Kurdish rights and freedoms, but as women who were simultaneously oppressed by the state and by society, they recognized their rights, their equality with men, and their freedom.

This was an important element of the enlightenment of Kurdish women. We have gained confidence and trust in ourselves. We did not simply follow established policies but also took part in creating new policies. We came onto the streets with new innovative slogans. We challenged not just the state's perspective but also the established rules of society. The male-dominated political establishment usually does not make women's issues their main argument. However, day-by-day, women's participation and active demanding of their rights while coming out onto streets has been increasing. When women come onto the streets for a demonstration, some of them bring along their children. Others leave their husband at home, to look after the children.

**NA,LT: How do you assess the role of the Kurdish political leadership in addressing these**

## changes?

GK: Women have fought a lot for their rights. But especially for the initial movement and involvement you need a strong leadership. We are lucky that we had - and still have - this. Of course the changes and evolution of the role of women within the Kurdish movement and Kurdish society would not be easy without the full support of the Kurdish leader, Abdullah Öcalan, who has been imprisoned by Turkey since 1999, more than 17 years. Since the 1990s, Öcalan advised women's organizations to create separate branches to promote rights and equality within the wider movement and society. He repeatedly said that if women do not create their own free and autonomous branches, dominant and traditional men would try to destroy women after any achievements. These separate branches should not be just created within society or locally, but also within political parties and guerrilla movements. He also advised men to abandon the traditionalist perspective, the primitive ideology of men and masculinity. He believes that most societal problems are the creation of dominant masculine men. This is the reason why people make decisions for others without their agreement. This is the reason that many wars and conflicts are so often about power and ego. If we are going to change society, Öcalan and many of us believe that we should first eliminate patriarchal masculinity and the ego born from this masculinity.

**NA,LT: We have interviewed many different Kurdish women, including peace activists, mothers of martyrs, politicians, mayors, guerrillas, students, lawyers, community members and house wives. Different women experience historical developments and struggles differently. You have a very important role and hold a very important position as the co-mayor of Diyarbakir/Amed. What kind of difficulties and problems have you faced as a woman and a co-mayor?**

GK: My own life story has followed the development of the Kurdish women's movement. In the 1980s, I was imprisoned in Diyarbakir prison. This had notoriously brutal conditions, with torture and killings. To be Kurdish, to be a woman and to be leftist created triple difficulties for me. I was kept in a dog kennel for six months because I refused to say 'I am not a Kurd but a Turk'. Our older women friends, our mothers' age were tortured because they could not speak Turkish. I still have signs of torture from those days on my body.

This prison was a place for me to question everything about humanity. It was a place for me to recognize the importance of gender. It was a place for friendship and to create strong bonds with other women. After my life in prison, I became a university student. Together with many other Kurdish women, I took part in the women's struggle, both while I was in prison and also during my time in university. This destroyed any fears I had. In fact, the heavy burden and difficulties developed my self-confidence. If I think back to those days, when I was a 19-year-old university student, it is difficult now to imagine how I managed all those difficult challenges whilst almost continually being under attack for my Kurdish identity, for my mother tongue and most importantly for being a woman.

It was not an easy period in my life and in the lives of many other Kurdish women. The difficult conditions forced us to make choices: to surrender and accept the state's idea of a unitary identity and to assimilate - or to resist against all oppression. Under those difficult conditions, we questioned the role of state and society, and the established role and identity of women. But we also thought about human rights, the importance of diverse identities, and our own Kurdish identity and practices. We decided to work against all oppression since they fed on each other. Without that historical development and those experiences, I would not have my current advantages, and my strong role. The women who jump into politics, without the kind of experiences we all had, may well face some difficulty in the beginning. We fought with masculine politics at every stage of our movement.

### **NA,LT: How did your political experiences develop after your university days?**

GK: In the 1990s, when conditions were very difficult and there was no sign of freedom – just like it is now – I worked for newspapers where Kurdish and women's rights were the main issue. These were alternatives to the mainstream newspapers. The conditions for journalists, especially for Kurdish journalists were harsh - just like today. Some of our journalist friends were killed while they were doing their work. I worked as a journalist for 13 years and published sections focusing on women's issue within the newspaper.

During the hard time of the 1990s, many autonomous women's organizations were established. I took different roles within these, and worked to support their activities. In 1996, the Kurdish political movement created a separate women's branch. This developed into a system of political representation. In 1999 for the first time three Kurdish women were elected as local mayors. This number more than tripled in 2004 and we had 14 women mayors. Most importantly, we started co-chairing in 2004, although at the time this was not legal. But the women were all pressured by their male co-chairs. They were perceived as assistants. After 2007, women became more visible and powerful. The 2007 elections were revolutionary for both Kurdish and Turkish women. 8 out of 26 Kurdish MPs were women. Women became more confident as co-chairs and men had to accept them as equals. Other political parties were embarrassed and started to introduce a co-chair system as well. But it was not simply a matter of a quota and co-chairing, but the actual style and work of parliament changed. Women did not ask for permission any more to speak on important subjects such as the defence budget. All these steps have helped Kurdish women to develop their own independent branches. The aim was to put new brick on top of the existing ones and so to move forward women's issues. We are becoming stronger with every passing day.

### **NA,LT: What do you consider as your main challenges in the past?**

GK: It might be difficult to believe but when I look back at my own experience and story, the hardest time for me as a woman was not in prison. It was not my time at university or when I was working as a journalist. But it was the struggle we had to fight in order to get a women's quota for MPs. During the time before the 2007 general election when we made our first important moves towards a quota, our male friends were happy about our hard work. We were organizing meetings and demonstrations, and were facing the police on a daily basis as we worked hard in our political and gender struggles. In the 2007 general election, the Kurdish political party did not run as a party, because of the ten-per cent threshold, but put forward independent candidates, and the Kurdish women's movement wanted to achieve a women's quota even it was for independent candidates. We wanted an equal number of male and female MPs. The 40 per cent quota for women had been one of our party policies since 2002, but its implementation had been postponed to the next election. We did not want any further postponement. We wanted the policy to be put into practice. Our attempts created a big discussion within the Kurdish political movement. There were several barriers from the established political traditions and from dominant men. There were two main questions: first how many women should be put into electable positions; and secondly who was going to decide about these women candidates?

### **NA,LT: A woman's quota was already part of your party policy. Why did many men in the Kurdish political movement object?**

GK: Yes, it was there and for that reason – theoretically at least – they could not be against our demands. We had already had this as a party policy for almost 5 years. However, some men created different excuses, such as society was not ready yet. Other argued that women should be happy with a smaller quota, and once society becomes ready we will put the 40 per cent into practice. In other words, we were supposed to wait years or even decades for society to become ready. They knew that

a good number of women were going to be elected and also that it was going to affect some men's chances to become MPs. We were ready to do political demonstrations in every part of the country, to communicate with people in the cities, but also to go to villages, to talk to old and young members of our society, to convince them about our role in representing them. We did not want to fail for lack of trying. However, many of our male friends continued to offer just a few positions to women. Even though we started co-chairing in 2004, until 2007 they did not really include women co-chairs in any meaningful way. They even called our female co-chairs Yenge (sister-in-law), as a way of showing they were not equals but assistants. We wanted to change this symbolic representation and instead make it full and meaningful.

Most men and even some women following the old traditions did not want to recognize that the Kurdish women's movement was not fragile any more. It was strong enough to take what it deserved. Yes, we had Leyla Zana as an example of an MP in 1991, but her role and power did not come from women's organisations or representation. She was the wife of a famous Kurdish politician, Mehdi Zana, a former mayor of Diyarbakir, who also went to prison in the 1980s for his political views. When Leyla Zana was first elected, her social status and her being the wife of somebody famous was the main reason for her to be elected. Of course, later she has become a very important Kurdish figure and politician in her own right. As an elected MP, Zana had to face prison, along with several other Kurdish MPs, and she stayed there for almost a decade, just like her husband and many other Kurdish politicians..

In 2007, men in the Kurdish political movement accepted the number of women to be elected, but they came out with a new offer: to put a few famous women or the wives of famous men onto the list. According to our male friends, that would have been easier for society to accept. But we said no. Because the number itself was not going to be meaningful as long as the proper acknowledgment of women was not recognized by men and society. We were strongly against accepting a few symbolic women. We wanted to exist and make decisions at all levels. We also decided that the female candidates should not be decided on by men or in joint meetings. Women's organizations should decide on their own candidates. After long and harsh arguments, we won this battle as well. We created a women's election committee in parallel to the previous general election committee and the women's branches decided on their own candidates. In the end, 8 out of 26 women MPs were elected in 2007. Almost all our women candidates had more votes than their male colleagues. The women found it much easier to make connections with different social groups. Their messages were much clearer. Society was ready; even if the previous male dominated power holders were not.

**NA,LT: Many commentators see the involvement and power of Kurdish women as a simple change in policy and practice. But your experience illustrates that it is an on-going struggle that has been difficult on many levels.**

GK: It looks simple now, but it was certainly not easy to put this simple action into practice. The discussions before, and the results of the 2007 election marked a radical revolution for Kurdish and Turkish women rights and position in Turkey. First, the idea of women not being able to succeed was destroyed. Second, the well-known male stereotype of society not being able to accept women was challenged as well. Society actually welcomed women. Third, the general tradition of electing only well-known, famous women or wives of famous men was challenged. Women were elected with their own identity, from a mix of economic, social, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Before the 2007 election, people in our society still called women who had been elected as mayors 'Mr. President' (Baskan Bey). When a mayor visited somewhere most people were expecting to see a man. They asked 'where is Mr. President', and found it difficult to see a woman in power. When a woman mayor was elected, people would speculate that the city was run by men behind the scenes. The outcome of the 2007 election destroyed all these ideas and women mayors or MPs can now be accepted with power without any shadows behind her. Our system of co-chairs at all levels has become more

visible, strong and stable since the 2007 election.

**NA,LT: Do you feel that you have achieved gender-based equality within the Kurdish political movement and in Kurdish society?**

GK: It is not easy to make deep societal changes in a short time, but it is happening. Now many Turkish and Kurdish people may not know the names of male Kurdish MPs, or politicians, but they usually know the names of Kurdish female politicians. 2007 was a big test for us. But the real test of success is continuity and the normalization of gender equality and representation in politics for the next generations. We have worked very hard, sometimes more than our male friends, to make this happen. The future generations, the young members of women's organizations, have important responsibilities for the continuation of equality and to change the established male-dominated tradition of power. We should also know and accept that there are many women who have played passive or even active roles in the continuation of patriarchal society. There are many women who have become masculinized and act like men in our society. They are a barrier we need to deal with and change. If our progressive women's organizations ever relax with the power they have gained, then that power could easily be taken away again by male dominated power holders. Equality of power must be institutionalized and become one of the most important societal norms if our advances are to continue.

**NA,LT: How have these changes translated into Turkish politics and affected the work of other parties?**

GK: Our new gender role and practices have pushed changes in the Turkish political parties and the legal system. I would like to share a few examples, beginning in the Turkish parliament, where our Kurdish umbrella party at the time (DTP – Democratic Society Party) secured a female deputy leader in 2007. This was a 'first' for any political party in Turkey. This position allowed the leader, Fatma Kurtulan, to organize all party politics, and to speak in the name of the party. Other political parties joined in. The CHP (Republican People's Party), which claims to be a leftist party, was embarrassed by this initiative and they also elected a woman deputy leader. And then the Erdoğan-led AKP (Justice and Development Party) also followed with these changes. It has almost now become a rule for political parties in Turkey to elect one male and one female deputy leader.

The second radical change was that for the first time in the Turkish parliament, women started to talk about important issues, including defence, foreign relations, economic and energy investments and the state budget. I was the first woman who was elected to the commission of state budget planning and became the only woman working with 44 men. Previously, women were almost always limited to a few issues, like family matters and some social problems. All other topics, especially those connected with defence budgets and policies, were left to men to deal with. We challenged this conservative approach and our female MPs started to make proposals regarding almost all issues.

This was another shock for the other political parties. They could not understand and accept that women should also take part on defence budget issues. They did not want women to have any involvement with important state matters. They wanted women just to speak about women's issues, children and family matters. We destroyed this very bad, men-oriented political tradition.

The third important change is that with our party co-chair leadership system and practice we pushed for the Turkish legal system to be changed. Now it is legal in Turkey, other political parties can use the same system. However, until now, no other political parties except the Public's Democratic Party (HDP), the Kurdish dominated party, have adopted this practice in parliament.

**NA,LT: These very important changes have challenged many traditions in the Turkish**

**political system. Do you think these positive changes will continue and perhaps further close the gender gap in practice?**

GK: Of course the long history of inequality has created huge gaps and it is not possible to close these in 10 or 20 years. After 2007 we did not stop. In the 2011 election, more women gained power, and in the 2014 local election and the 2015 general election we have reached almost equal levels of representation in the Kurdish political party, as well as at the levels of city, town and village representation. As a party, we hold mayoral power in 102 different cities and towns in Turkey and in all of these, the mayors rule according to the co-chair system, with one man and one woman. We have had to fight for this. Our male friends started with the idea that they could understand equality at the level of the political party, but not for mayors. They thought it was a position where men can do better and make decisions more quickly. After a long battle we have won this argument as well. As you see at all levels we have to fight to have any meaningful equality. Now co-mayors make decisions together and equally. One is not more important than the other. We try to create full and permanent equality.

This is not just about numbers of individuals but also about the equality of input from different genders. We are now working on making the co-chair system at the mayoral level legal: it is practiced de facto by us but is not yet legal. But we made similar changes around political leadership and I believe we will do it at mayoral level too. As a party and as a community, we have increased trust in women's roles and positions.

This is not something we were given. We have had to fight for every single advance. For that reason I want to believe that these rights and the fight for equality is not going to be taken away from women. But we cannot relax and must keep on working even harder than we have already done.

**NA,LT: From your experiences we can see the creation of any permanent equality is not an easy process. The outcome of our research in the Middle East but also other contexts around the globe indicate that in many places successful women forget their gendered identity after a while. Especially women leaders often buy into and project masculinist identities. As co-mayor of Diyarbakir what are the advantages or disadvantages of working as a woman? How much, and in what ways can you represent your gender identity?**

GK: To be mayor of Diyarbakir is a very important and honourable position. However, this can be sometimes a problem, especially if you come from a strong political background, like me. To have the experience of my political background and having been an MP for two terms, as well as having been the co-chair of the party in the past might all look like an advantage. But in practice, all this does not help women's rights in general. Many of our male friends say that I can do it, because I have this great experience unlike other women. They do not want to see me as a result of the success of the Kurdish women's movement. Instead they want to believe and see that Gültan is an exception. I try to explain and fight against this very wrong assumption. There is the strong power of the Kurdish women's movement behind my individual success. Without this movement, I would not be here. We, within the Kurdish women's movement, now try to make those still adhering to the patriarchal tradition understand that every woman can be as successful as every man, at least if they are given equal support, chances and trust. My story is not just my story; it is the story of the success of Kurdish women.

Another danger we should be aware of is that those in the male dominated tradition do not want to see a successful woman as a woman any more. They de-genderise successful women. They try to kill our gender identity, to see us as men, even expecting us to act like men. They believe that every successful woman has male hormones. We must not tolerate this. They do not mind if I as a Gültan, co-mayor of Diyarbakir, enter male areas, such as mosques or teashops. But they don't want me as a

woman. They say: 'you are welcome, because you are our President, but we don't want other women here.' According to them, if somebody is mayor, they have reached the level of men. When I remind them that I am also a woman they still hesitate to accept this idea. As you can see, there are still many barriers. One ends and another one starts.

**NA,LT: If we look at work places and traditionally male dominated public spaces more broadly, what level of change have you witnessed over the last years?**

GK: There were not any women deputy mayors previously in Diyarbakir. All four deputies were men. After several months of battles we managed to get a position for women. There were 19 different departments below the mayor of Diyarbakir and women were managing just two of them. Now we have increased this to six, but the aim is to have equal numbers. The problem was not that we did not have qualified women for these positions before, in fact we had much better qualified women than men ready to work. But these positions were seen as positions for men.

Many women also accepted these traditions until recently. As part of Diyarbakir municipality, we have established a special department named Department of Women Policies. There are no similar examples of this in Turkey in any other local areas. This new department will have three main foci: 1. to deal with and reduce violence against women; 2. to increase women's education, including making them aware of their rights; 3. to help women gain new skills and become more economically independent. This women's department has the right and a sufficiently senior position to observe all investment programs and to evaluate to what extent these programs include the gender dimension or not.

Our aim is to confront all male-occupied spaces and make women more independent socially, economically, and legally. Our previous mayor, Mr. Osman Baydemir, also tried to challenge this male dominated ideology. During his time, 20 women were hired for fire-fighter positions and 15 for bus driver positions. These are very important changes. The aim of these policies was to break down traditional barriers. But their male colleagues and the established male ideology made life very difficult for these female fire fighters and bus drivers. Many of them wanted to return to office work. Our male friends defended their actions and claimed that 'fire-fighter and bus drivers are heavy jobs, requiring 24 hour work, including night shifts. How can women do this? We cannot create separate bathrooms and sleeping rooms for them. It will be too expensive and too complicated. Society is not ready'. Our answer is that if doctors, nurses can do their job with separate living conditions, something should be done for fire-fighters and bus drivers too. As you can see many of our male friends are not against women's equality in theory, but when it comes to practice and practicalities, they create many obstacles.

Resistance is not simply coming from society, but it is coming from some of our male friends within our political movement. There is still a long way to go. We should not sacrifice our gendered identity and should not tolerate when they come to us with sexist offers. We also have to remember the obstacles society and we face all the time. It's not just about equality in leadership or gaining some specific numbers in more powerful position. New traditions of equality in the workplace and in society need to be generalized and normalized. If this does not happen then just having women in symbolic positions, like the one I have now, will not be enough for any real, meaningful and permanent equality and freedom.

**NA,LT: How do you evaluate the latest situation in Diyarbakir and in the region in general?**

GK: As you already know, we have been going through a very difficult time with war and atrocities recently, following a more hopeful time starting with the peace letter of Mr. Abdullah Öcalan during the Newroz celebrations in 2013. We were hoping for true negotiations, reconciliation and

democratization in Turkey. However, due to many reasons and developments, the ruling AKP government decided not to pursue a democratic solution to the Kurdish issue and waged another war on Kurds on all fronts, including our city Diyarbakir, other neighbouring cities and towns as well as Rojava. We have lost thousands of people, many of whom are innocent civilians, young children and women. Our cities and towns have almost been invaded and many districts were completely destroyed with all houses demolished, and the infrastructure destroyed. As if all this was not enough, we, as co-mayors are also facing judicial injustices. 22 of our co-mayors were arrested and 31 others were dismissed from office without any concrete legal grounds. Among them, 17 are female co-mayors. Despite all the difficulties and obstacles, we are trying to continue our municipal services on the one hand and show solidarity with the people affected by the clashes on the other hand.

I cannot say that international bodies, organizations and the media have been sensitive and attentive enough to the problems we are facing. However, as we know from past experiences, international campaigns and solidarity work is crucial in stopping atrocities and clashes. I hope the western world breaks its silence and puts more pressure on Turkey and the ruling AKP so that the government will shift towards negotiation for a peaceful solution of the problems.

**NA,LT: How did the more recent wave of crack down and clashes influence your work and struggle for greater gender-based equality and justice?**

GK: I think Kurdish women are having a more difficult time now than at any other time in the last three decades. The state's military operations in the Kurdish regions during the last year was no longer limited to rural areas. They have destroyed all city life and put a huge burden on people's shoulders, especially on women. The Turkish Human Rights Organisation has published a report about what has happened between 16 August 2015 and 18 March 2016 in 7 cities and 22 towns in the Kurdish regions. According to this report, a total of 1 million and 642 thousand people were affected by the state's operations and curfews. 320 people have lost their lives (72 children and 62 women). Tens of thousands of houses were destroyed. At least 250 thousand people are homeless now, because of the destruction of their houses. Women and children have been especially affected by this damage. Most of them have been living in uncivilized conditions in tents without water and electricity for months. They cannot find enough food and clean water to keep them alive. They don't have access to any health system. Although women have tried to protect themselves and their children from illnesses, the rates of premature birth, neonatal deaths, stillbirth, and child deaths have all increased. Children are traumatised and most have lost their normal lives and trust.

During the military operations, the death of 62 women illustrates how women have been used as easy targets by the state. In Silopi, the 57 year old Taybet Inan was killed by state forces but her body was left on the street for 7 days, because snipers targeted anyone who tried to remove her body. This shows how the state uses women's bodies as part of its politics and sees women and their actions as dangerous. It is an important proof that the masculine state hates women.

In the Kurdish women's movement, we have tried to help our people. We continue our education programmes and close connections with women. We are organizing to help people with their daily needs. We try to limit the effects of trauma among women and children. Despite the relentless war by the state against our people, women have not surrendered. They continue to resist in many ways. Many of our friends and political activists have been killed, including Asya Yuksel (the spokesperson for the Cizre Women's Council), Seve Demir (the Women's Rights representative for Silopi), Fatma Uyar and Pakize Nayır. These women did not leave their towns, cities, but continued to help their people despite knowing their lives were in danger.

Because of the war conditions and other urgent priorities, we are focusing less on violence against

women within families. We are not ignoring this important issue, but most of our workers have to deal with other problems at the moment. This provides important evidence of yet another way that war and conflict increases violence against women, especially within families and on the street. I hope the war conditions will not continue - this would put women's rights in further danger and even put us back to the old days. I hope this difficult time will end soon and will even help us to move the Kurdish women's movement one more step further on, as we managed in the 1980s and 1990s.

**NA,LT: Did you expect the latest military coup? How is the failed coup and its aftermath affecting Kurdish women and people in general?**

GK: As I mentioned at the beginning of our interview, myself and many other Kurds have directly suffered as a result of previous military coups in Turkey. I was taken to the infamous Diyarbakir prison following the military coup (12 September 1980). I know very well the bad effects of a military coup. There has always been the possibility of a military coup in Turkey. For that reason, the recent military coup was no surprise to me. I am very angry that no proper measures were taken to stop this coup. As a mayor of Diyarbakir, I have responsibilities for my people. I worry that this will affect our city and our people negatively. This is what always happened during and after the previous military coups. If I go back to that evening, on 15 July 2016, we first tried to work out if there were any street clashes and conflict happening in our city. The leader of the HDP, Mr Selahattin Demirtaş, was in Diyarbakir that evening. I visited him and talked to him about the coup and its possible results. The HDP made a strong official statement straight away and made their position very clear: they were totally against any military coup. We anxiously followed all developments that evening and afterwards, just like many other Kurdish people and HDP members.

Looking at the results: we can see that the high ranking military generals and personnel who carried out a very brutal war against Kurdish people were directly involved in this military coup. This shows that the war in Kurdistan and the level of democracy in Turkey are directly connected with one another. Sadly we can see that these generals, who have carried out crimes against Kurds and violated all human rights in Kurdistan, are not blamed for this reason. They are only blamed for a coup attempt, carried out against democracy.

But we should know that the war in Kurdistan and the coup mentality are interconnected. If the crimes and war in the country continue, especially what we have witnessed against Kurds in the last two years, there will be always a strong possibility that entrenched military ideologues will continue to attempt coups, as they try to control power. War in Kurdistan increases the military mentality and opens a way for anti-democratic actions in the country. With no shame, the generals who organised the coup, are claiming the significant role they played in the war against Kurds as part of their defense. They try to justify themselves by proclaiming what big Turkish nationalists they are.

I am quite sure that the war against Kurds in the last two years, which was led by the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government, was planned and carried out by these military generals and police chiefs. We understand exactly how well these generals and police chiefs understand democracy. However, even after the coup, the AKP government has not shown any clear sign that they are going to stop the war against Kurds. If the AKP is really keen on democracy and is a true champion of democratic values, they could learn lessons from the latest military coup and adopt democratic solutions to the Kurdish issue. We do not yet know what kind of strategy will now be followed by Erdoğan, the Turkish president, concerning the Kurdish issue. After the coup Erdoğan and the AKP have started a dialogue with most of the opposition political parties. However, since the HDP and Kurds are not included in this dialogue, this has created suspicions that a democratic solution may not be the priority for the Erdoğan and his government.

**Gültan Kışanak, Latif Tas , Nadjé Al-Ali**

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**P.S.**

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<https://www.opendemocracy.net/nadje-al-ali-latif-tas-g-ltan-ki-anak/kurdish-women-s-battle-continues-against-state-and-patriarchy->

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