FACULTY OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

An Evolution from Maternal Activism to Political Motherhood

An Illustration of the Saturday Mothers of Istanbul

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Abstract

English version:

During this research I will focus on the concepts of maternal activism and political motherhood. I argue that maternal activism can evolve into political motherhood, and I will show this through the case of the Saturday Mothers of Istanbul. Maternal Activism is a process in which a woman or a group of women use the figure of the mother in order to make claims on behalf of their sons or daughters and demand social change (Mendoza, 2016). Meaning that just like in the case of the Saturday Mothers, they are the mothers who take to the streets to make demands considering the lives of their children, rather than demands considering themselves. Political motherhood is a movement in which women use their maternal roles to challenge the confinement of women in the domestic sphere, meaning they utilize their motherhood to gain access into the political realm (Schirmer, 1993; Werbner, 1999). I will do this with the data I required during my fieldwork in Istanbul where I gathered data concerning to how both the Saturday Mothers themselves as experts in the Human Rights fields look the Saturday Mothers as activists, their roles as mothers and as political actors and how their views and goals have changed over time. In this way I will show that by going through the struggle of the protests the Saturday Mothers saw more of the political reality and wanted more change. Transforming them into political actors and thus going from maternal activism to political motherhood.

Dutch version:

In dit onderzoek focus ik op de concepten van maternal activism en political motherhood. Ik beargumenteer dat maternal activism kan leiden tot political motherhood en ik zal dit aantonen met de case study van de Saturday Mothers in Istanbul. is een proces waarbij een vrouw of een groep vrouwen hun moederrol gebruiken om namens hun kinderen sociale verandering te eisen (Mendoza, 2016). Dit betekent dat, net als in het geval van de Saturday Mothers, het de moeders zijn die de straat opgaan om eisen te stellen met betrekking tot het leven van hun kinderen, in plaats van eisen met betrekking tot zichzelf. Political Motherhood is een beweging waarin vrouwen hun moederrol gebruiken om de plaatsing van vrouwen in de privé-sfeer aan te vechten, wat betekent dat ze hun moederschap gebruiken om toegang te krijgen tot het politieke domein (Schirmer, 1993; Werbner, 1999). Ik zal dit doen aan de hand van de data die ik verzameld had tijdens mijn veldwerk in Istanbul, waar ik gegevens verzamelde over hoe zowel de Saturday Mothers zelf als deskundigen op het gebied van de mensenrechten de Saturday Mothers als activisten bekijken, hun rollen als moeders en als politieke actoren en hoe hun opvattingen en doelstellingen in de loop van de tijd zijn veranderd. Op deze manier zal ik aantonen dat door de strijd van de protesten te doorstaan de Saturday Mothers meer van de politieke realiteit zagen en meer verandering wensten. Ze veranderden in politieke actoren en evolueerden zo van Maternal activism in political motherhood.

Dedicated to the Saturday Mothers of Istanbul

Thank you for your bravery

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Inhoudsopgave

1. Introduction

When I walked through Istanbul, I had to pass Istiklal street every day. My hostel was on a side street of Istiklal and considering how long the street was, there was no other way to get anywhere without passing through it. As Istanbul's main shopping street with also many state office buildings like the post-office and Galatasaray Highschool and with Taksim Square at the end, the road is always filled with all kinds of people. There are office workers, students, tourists trying to take a picture of the classical tram that still rides to the street and even a Christian preacher trying to convert people through speeches with a megaphone. But the most prominent group of people are the omnipresent police forces. At all times you can spot them anywhere in the street. There are multiple police vehicles present at all times throughout the street, police groups in full armed uniform sometimes or with a bright orange, fluorescent vest that says police on the back. But their presence did not make me feel safer when I went through the street. As the main objective for visiting Istanbul was to conduct fieldwork on the Saturday Mothers, all I could think of was the extreme police violence they were subjected to. Even though this was just the everyday presence of normal weekdays. However on Saturday at noon, there were significantly more police officers present, even though the Saturday Mothers have not been physically protesting since the 25th of August 2018. It is telling that they still feel the need to guard the square so much more on a Saturday at 12:00. Aside from the police presence, Galatasaray Square has also been altered in other manners. Before Galatasaray High School, on the corner of the square the Saturday Mothers usually sit, there are now big wooden panels that read "Istiklal Street", my friend told me that is was meant to show the history of the street. On the panels there was a map of the street with many photographs of the street and the people in it. But the absence of pictures of the Saturday Mothers, who have taken over the street every week on Saturday for half an hour and this for over 27 years, were painfully obvious. The combination of the continuous police presence and the alterations on Galatasaray Square such as the panels and the permanent police barricade before the post-office show the impact the Saturday Mothers have had on the political and public scene in Istanbul.

(Participant Observation, Istanbul, April 2022)

The Saturday Mothers are a human rights activist group that have been active in Istanbul since the 27th of May 1995. Since then, they have taken over Galatasaray Square in Istanbul every Saturday at noon for half an hour (J, 2020). The Saturday Mothers are a movement of relatives of people who were victim of enforced disappearances in Turkey during the 1980's and 1990's. Enforced disappearances mean that they were taken by the state forcefully. The bodies have never been found. The state also denies any form of involvement with these disappearances despite the presence of multiple witnesses (Goral, 2016). This group of disappeared is estimated to be around 1300 people who have fallen victim to enforced disappearances in three different periods of time. First, the people who disappeared during the 80's after the coup. Second, the spokespersons of the Kurdish and leftist movements during the 90's. Third, the citizens living in the eastern Turkey and Istanbul who were accused of being affiliated with leftist political organizations or the PKK (Hafiza Merkezi, 2021). The Saturday Mothers demand that the state is held accountable for these disappearances and they demand more information over their loved ones, they want to know what has happened to them and where they are. Since the Saturday Mothers have become active in 1995 they have been subjected to police harassment, ill-treatment, detentions, and prosecution. Following this series of violent repressions, the Saturday Mothers stopped protesting for a period of ten years between 1999 and 2009. In 2009 they restarted their demonstrations after new cases of enforced disappearances emerged However, in Turkey the act demonstrating without official approval can be considered as an imprisonable office. As a precaution the Saturday Mothers decided to limit their protests to the reading of an official press release on Galatasaray Square, in this way they do not need to ask for official approval. Outside parties and organizations with opposing political agendas have repeatedly attempted to exploit the Mothers' legitimacy by showing up to yell slogans. The operations of such groups, which upset and anger the police, are counterproductive and have created a new risk for the Mothers (Baydar, 2006). The Saturday Mothers had wanted to hold their 700th gathering on August 25, 2018, the same way they had organized the previous 699 gatherings. However, the Beyoğludistrict governor's office refused to let it take place: police swooped in with tear gas. They arrested dozens of protesters who are now charged with unlawfully attending protests and meetings, including one of the pioneering Saturday Mothers, 83-year-old Emine Ocak. Since then, they cannot meet on Galatasaray square anymore. They do continue to meet, but now at the IHD office and post their weekly press statements on their YouTube platform (Hafiza Merkezi, 2020; Cumartesi Anneleri, 2022). They want to return to Galatasaray however, it being like a sacred ground for them as the square is where they go to remember their children. And while many of the founding protesters are growing older, their children are taking the reins (Personal Communication, 23/04/2022).

During this research I will focus on the concepts of maternal activism and political motherhood. I want to argue that maternal activism can evolve into political motherhood, and I will show this through the case of the Saturday Mothers of Istanbul. Maternal Activism is a process in which a woman or a group of women use the figure of the mother in order to make claims on behalf of their sons or daughters and demand social change (Mendoza, 2016). Meaning that just as in the case of the Saturday Mothers, it are the mothers who take to the streets to make demands considering the lives of their children, rather than demands considering themselves. Political motherhood is a movement in which women use their maternal roles to challenge the confinement of women in the domestic sphere, meaning they utilize their motherhood to gain access into the political realm (Schirmer, 1993; Werbner, 1999). The Saturday Mothers can now also be seen as political actors, with more different and political goals then when they started in 1995 with their maternal activism. While both concepts are based on the motherhood role of the activists, there a several important differences which I will highlight further in this research.

Maternal activism and political motherhood are often used interchangeably, and while they are indeed often intertwined, I argue that a movement can start out as a form of maternal activism. However, this form of activism can lead to a transformation in the mothers' identity which in turn leads them to become political as well. In this way they also become an example of political motherhood. As stated before, I will illustrate this by the evolution the Saturday Mothers of Istanbul have made in over 27 years of activism spanning different generations of women (Hafiza Merkezi, 2020). I will further place this case study in the theoretical debate of the public-private divide and how this is still a very gendered divide in the Turkish context (Toköz, 2015). I selected the case of the Saturday Mothers because, despite an increasing interest in them in recent years, there still has not been written a lot about them. When regarding maternal activism or political motherhood most literature is still situated in Latin America where maternalism is a much-researched phenomenon, as I will discuss later in the literature review.

I will thus research how the Saturday Mothers evolved from maternal activism to political motherhood. To do this I will look specifically at the conceptual models of maternal activism and political motherhood. As the evolution starts with maternal activism I will begin with its definition and history to see where the term comes from, and most importantly which definition I will use to understand and define the Saturday Mothers. Secondly, I will also look at the relation between state violence and maternal activism and how these two phenomena are connected. Thirdly, I will have

a closer look at the emergence of a collective motherhood as a consequence of this maternal activism. Lastly, I will look at some other examples of maternalism to properly show the effects it has had societies in the past. Afterwards follows a similar evaluation of political motherhood where I will again look at the history and specify the definition I will utilize on the case of the Saturday Mothers later on. Furthermore I will look at the two main uses of which political motherhood. In the last part of the literature review I will also place these two concepts into the existing feminist literature and highlight the main controversies they have sparked in the feminist debate. Then I will show how they fit into the larger theoretical framework of the public-private divide and of the authoritarian state.

For my analysis of how the Saturday Mothers fit into these models I went to Istanbul for ten days in order to conduct my fieldwork. Once there, I conducted interviews with six of the Saturday Mothers, two members of the Human Rights Association and one member of Amnesty International Istanbul. Out of these interviews I got the data necessary to analyze how both the Saturday Mothers as experts in the human rights fields perceive the Saturday Mothers as activists, their roles as mothers and as political actors and how their views and goals have changed over time. Out of my participant observation during meetings, I gathered data on how the Saturday Mothers operate and how their relationship is with the state. The full scale of my fieldwork is written out below in an extensive methodology as I received a lot of data here. Out of the combination of this data and the literature review I was able to make an analysis that fully placed the Saturday Mothers into these both concepts and highlight the conceptual evolution from maternal activism to political motherhood. First, I placed the Saturday Mothers into their complex historical and political background in order to fully understand what has happened that led to the emergence of this activist group. Secondly, I looked at how the Saturday Mothers fit into the model of maternal activism. I looked at their history and how they were formed. But also, at how their identity as mothers served as an initial protection and how this protection faded away during the start of the police violence against them. Thirdly, I looked at the evolution into political motherhood and what has changed over time for them to become political actors. Lastly, I looked at how they seized and claimed their place within the political sphere on a national and international level.

2. Theoretical framework: Perspectives on Maternal Activism and Political Motherhood

2.1. Introduction

Maternal activism and political motherhood are two concepts that are often used interchangeably. In this paper I will illustrate that they are not the same, but that political motherhood can in fact be an extension of maternal activism. Nevertheless, there is still a big overlap between the two concepts in history, use and cases. In order to do this, I will first locate both maternal activism and political motherhood in the existing literature and debates. I will start with maternal activism by defining the concept and situating its origins I will look closer at the relation between maternal activism and state violence, what influence these concepts have on one another and on how they can evolve the experience of motherhood from a purely individual experience to a collective one. Consequently, I will have a closer look at the archetype of maternal activism, the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo and their link to my case study, that of the Saturday Mothers. Secondly, I will look at political motherhood and the different definitions, and usages of it, and how it is used in the Turkish case. Lastly, I will look at how these concepts fit into both feminist literature and the bigger theoretical debates surrounding them.

2.2. Maternal Activism

2.2.1. Definition and History

First and foremost, it is essential to clarify what is meant by maternal activism in this research. Maternal activism is a gendered form of activism based on maternalism, as the name implies. The basis of maternal activism lies in the concept of maternalism and how it is used in a political context. In short, maternal politics are grounded in lived realities and political economies. They are informed by cultural practices and meanings given to motherhood in their society. Essentialist categorizations are rejected and its reflective of women's complex and contradictory locations. The politics are based on the maternal status that is given to motherhood and that status is utilized to accomplish certain goals. The maternal status can be used for many things including, calling for peace, protection of the environment, welfare, justice, etc. (Lawson, 2018). There are three key elements to identify in maternalism according to Gideon & Ramm (2020): Recognition of the public

importance of mothering and taking care of children; An extension of the political and social values that are given to the ethics and ideals that are linked to maternal care; And in the best-case scenario, politics that challenge the gendered boundaries between public and private, state and civil society and men and women (Gideon & Ramm, 2020). Based on these three elements maternal politics can be built. As we will see later in this study, the Saturday Mothers are built from wanting to take care of their children. As a consequence, they get immediate national and international support because of the image of the grieving mothers. And while the Turkish state is actively working against them, they still have challenged the public-private boundaries.

In addition, we must take a closer look at the activism part to have a complete understanding of maternal activism. The first academical analyses of women's activism based on the identity of motherhood started in the 1990's. It focused on women's activism in Western- Europe and the United States, and the relation to the gendered welfare state and how gender divides possibly negatively affected women and their children (Plant & Klein, 2012). However, just as with maternalism, women's mobilization based on their identity as a mother is present in several more area's than just that of the welfare state. We can see forms of maternal activism in environmental activism, human and minority rights, state-building processes, peace movements, revolutionary movements, and protests against state-led violence (Karaman, 2020). It is the latter that this research will be looking at. It is important to note that while the "maternal" frame may resonate globally due to the emotional connotation which is associated with the image of the caring mother, it is not a completely safe and protected frame of collective action (Carreon & Moghadam, 2015). As we will see later, the protection that motherhood provides initially wears off rather rapidly.

Finally, a first broad definition of maternal activism was delivered by Senem Kaptan (2010) in which she defines it as when the motherhood identity is used by woman all around the world in order to demand and achieve peace, justice and social and political change. I will look specifically at the maternal activism used by the Saturday Mothers of Turkey, who demand justice for their children. Because of this specific case study and context, I will also use a definition that is more focused on this aspect, namely the one of Mendoza (2016). Maternal activism, as Mendoza (2016) defines it in her article on the concept of maternal activism, refers to a process in which a woman or a group of women use the figure of the mother in order to make claims on behalf of their sons or daughters. The pursuit of a politics of visibility is at the heart of maternal activism. It raises awareness about a problem through a series of activities and performances in order to demand peace and/or social justice. The core method of maternal activism is the politics of visibility, which is used through public

protests, press releases, and direct action. It can be seen as a performative kind of activism (Mendoza, 2016). As we will see, the mother protest is a very visible way of protesting with the goal of being seen by as many people as possible and attract their attention in order to demand justice for and in name of their disappeared loved ones. This makes them fit perfectly into this definition.

2.2.2. Maternal Activism in relation to State Violence

As seen in many different cases, situations with state violence and specifically enforced disappearances have led to the birth of many groups of maternal activism. Such as the Abuelas De Plaza de Mayo, The Saturday Mothers of Turkey, and The Mourning Mothers of Iran as just a few of many examples (Karaman, 2016). So, in situations where there is extreme state violence, we witness the rise of maternal activism. In some cases, women mobilize as mothers and grandmothers in reaction to state repression, impunity cultures, militarism, and, in particular, when there is mass use of enforced disappearances. Mothers and grandmothers will leave the private sphere of their families and homes to take a stand in the public space, so they can influence the public sphere and even political discourse. For most women, this begins as "accidental activism", but it eventually evolves into a transformative and long-lasting kind of activism that provides them with previously unavailable political opportunities and structures (Carreon & Moghadam, 2015).

The starters of these kind of activist groups are the mothers whose traditional role as care givers to their families and homes were violated, and who fought for justice for their children (Schirmer, 1993). These groups of mothers utilize their status as mourning mothers and create frames that reflect their own experiences. Out of the tragedies they lived through they dedicate their lives to seek accountability for the horrors committed against their loved ones by the state. And by challenging the state to take responsibility and change, they try to create a better and safer society for everyone (Carreon & Moghadam, 2015). It is exactly in these kinds of cases that women find that, as mothers, they are provided with a moral voice that could expose injustice and promote the need for political change. Maternal activism has been fundamental in countries are undergoing extraordinary rates of violence or have in the past. In cases of systematic murder, torture and enforced disappearances, it has been demonstrated that mothers take up a central role in defying the state (Mendoza, 2006). Laqueur (2002) argues that this is due to the image of the mother as

the paradigmatic figure of mourning. In cases of mass disappearances, mothers become more prominent because they take on the task of mourning and remembering the death (Laqueur, 2002).

It is through motherhood that women gain public recognition. Because of the moral authority and prestige that is commonly attributed to motherhood, these women become more, instead of less, engaged in politics. In particular in those societies that value a mother above all other women, such as Turkey and Argentina (Taylor, 1997). Nonetheless, despite motherhood being one of the key elements of maternal activism, biological reasons do not lie at the basis of it. Maternal activism does not just stem from the actual experience of giving birth, but rather from systematic experiences of social and political neglect, violence and even death (Mendoza, 2016). We will see that it is often the death and, or disappearance of their children that led to the biggest cases of maternal activism. We start with the most famous case, that of the Abuela's de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, which is the same kind of maternal activism this research is located in.

2.2.3. Collective Motherhood

While giving birth is an individual experience, systematic experiences of political and social neglect, state violence and death are not. As said above, these experiences are at the core of the rise of maternal activism groups. Maternal activism is not always a purely biological experience, but also a public and collective one in order to achieve social justice (Mendoza, 2016). When different mothers come together to interact and protest, this shared maternal grief can transform to a "public motherhood" rather than remain a private expression of pain (Lawson, 2018). Butler argues that a public expression of grief can lead to a new type of political community. She states that through the act of collective mourning we enhance the need to oppose violence (Butler, 2004). In other words, an important aspect of maternal activism is that motherhood often evolves to a collective. While the mothers start out as individuals in search of their children, they end up as a mother to many. And this is something that is visible in all kinds of mother-groups around the world who have lost their children, husbands, fathers and other loved ones (Karaman, 2016).

According to Burchianti (2004), maternal activism uses collective mothering as a foundation for social and political activity. These mothers' emotional and seemingly apolitical demonstrations exposed the nation and the world to what was happening in cases where the state was responsible for the disappearance of dissidents. They can rely on the culturally significant and powerful

meanings and representations associated with maternal sorrow (Burchianti, 2004). Here, the important role of symbolic mothers or community mothers comes into play. In this practice, mothering is extended to women who do not have children of their own, but still embrace communal responsibility and act as community women. In doing so, motherhood has become a collective (Mendoza, 2006). This is also visible in the Saturday Mothers organization where there are members who are not mothers or even relatives. These people are often referred to as the Saturday People.

2.2.4. The Rise and Effects of Maternal Activism

Maternal activism is often found in regions with frequent political unrest. As earlier stated, one of the first clear and successful instances of maternal activism are the Abuela's in Argentina where mothers stood at the forefront of struggles for social justice. The abuela's de Plaza de Mayo were formed as a result of the Dirty War in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. It was a response of the mothers against the arrests, tortures and enforced disappearances of their loved ones by the military dictatorship. They gathered around their common identity of mothers on the main square of Plaza de Mayo to demand justice (Taylor, 2001). In 1976, a right-wing military coup overthrew the Argentinian government of Isabel Perón, which also came to be known as the Dirty War of Argentina. A military junta was installed, headed by Jorge Rafael Videla that created a repressive regime curtailing the rights of the country's citizens. The dictatorship lasted 7 years until 1983 and was supported by the US which turned Argentina into an important scene in the fight against communism. The fear of another Cuba led the US to fund and support the military coup, as well as train Latin-American armies to keep out the threat of communist thought. A system of enforced disappearances became the key strategy in keeping in check the population and installing a climate of fear in which free speech was largely restricted. This created a society characterized by fear and silence that deprived its citizens of basic human and civil rights. Armed groups controlled by the military junta kidnapped and killed anyone opposing or speaking out against the dictatorship. It is estimated that around 30.000 people disappeared because of this violent form of repression. The method proved very effective as the government was able to deny these practices because there were no bodies to connect to these crimes. Most of the victims held in the illegal detention centers spread around the country, were executed, thrown into the sea or died in captivity. Many of the people abducted had small children, or some of the women who were abducted were pregnant and were forced to give birth in captivity. These children were appropriated and given to families

favorable to the regime (Arditti, 2002). In that way they were separated from their real families as their identities were taken away.

Relatives of these missing persons met in government offices and started to share their grievances; a group of grandmothers decided to come together in a square in front of the Presidential in Buenos Aires for the first time on Thursday 30 April in 1977. This group came to be known as the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo who played a crucial role in resistance against the dictatorship and its repressive practices. To demand answers on what happened to their missing children and grandchildren, the grandmothers continued to gather in the square (Suero, 2018). They chose a peaceful and powerful way to demonstrate by gathering every Thursday in The Plaza de Mayo, holding silent marches and sit-ins, showing pictures of the children. Furthermore, they ensued legal battles and launched public awareness campaigns in their search for the grandchildren that were kidnapped along with their parents or born in detention (Bejarano, 2002). Internationally, they also managed to raise awareness about the atrocities committed during the military dictatorship and to gather support for their struggle in finding back the disappeared. The great success that the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo achieved led them to become an inspiration for many other mother-based groups in Latin-America and the rest of the world. In the Latin American context it even resulted in the formation of FEDEFAM, the Organization of Latin American countries for the Relatives of the Disappeared (Schirmer, 1993). It was the first big example and proof that the title of mother was highly regarded, and it had encouraged women to engage with the political scene. Mothers were also conscious of the social standing assigned to them. Women, especially when mobilized as mothers, were perceived as less of a threat to the military rule than men, meaning that the regime was less oppressive towards them (Orhan, 2008). Therefore, they had more of a chance to survive the protest (Schoellkopf, 2017).

These Abuelas have already been comprehensively studied and documented since they started over 40 years ago. And while they are still active as human rights activists and look for their children and grandchildren, they also have achieved many things. The dictatorship in Argentina has ended and their crimes were internationally recognized. Therefore, you cannot study maternal activism without mentioning the Abuelas. I will however be focusing on another group, in another continent, the Saturday Mothers of Istanbul. The Saturday Mothers are a group of maternal activists in Istanbul, Turkey. They became active in 1995 following the enforced disappearances of their children after the 1980 coup. Just like the Abuelas they took their roles as mothers from the house to the street. I focus on The Saturday Mothers because unlike the Abuelas, they are still in active

conflict with their state. And while there is more and more academic attention for the Saturday Mothers, these studies are still located mostly in Turkey itself and remain limited in numbers. Over the last 10 years there has been an increase in studies considering the Saturday Mothers. Here we can distinguish 5 different perspectives. Firstly, there are the historical and descriptive studies. Next, there is the democratization point of view on the Saturday Mothers (Goker, 2011). Thirdly academics have been looking into minorities and state violence against minority groups. Fourthly, there are studies that place them into gender and feminist perspectives. Lastly, the literature most relevant for this research are those that look at the Saturday Mothers as human rights activists and the violations they protest against (Karaman, 2020). Because mourning the dead is a task traditionally given to women, maternal organizations are often seen as the legitimate guardians of memories. The public display of maternal pain that is used by these organizations is an emotional reminder that the victims of systematical violence are more than a statistic. They had a name and a story, they belonged to a community and a family that is mourning them. In this way maternal activism is the ideal of a universal ethic of care and love in search of rightful retribution (Mendoza, 2006).

2.3. Political Motherhood

2.3.1. History and Definition

Again, to use the notion of political motherhood we have to look at what this term exactly means, and what definition of it I will be place this research into. To begin it is essential to define what is meant by ‘motherhood’. In feminist literature, key topics include motherhood as a social construction and mothering as the sum of maternal actions. Mothering encompasses a web of relationships and dynamic activities, such as childbearing and care. In other words, all forms of caring, from giving birth to educating and caring for the disabled and older generations, can be classified as mothering. It is also the primary medium through which people build their identities and place themselves within society. But mothering is also strongly connected with womanhood and strengthens women's gender identities because it is universally legitimized as a woman's work (Arendell, 2000). Regarding this last part we will see the issues feminism has with maternal concepts.

Just as with maternal activism we can find the roots of political motherhood in the United States. When the ideal of a divide between the public and private spheres were used to restrict women to

the confines of the private life, women used political motherhood as a way to participate in politics with the argument that the home was everywhere where the act of caring took place (Mhajne & Whetstone, 2018). Another similarity with maternal activism is the broad spectrum of goals political motherhood is used for. I will look at it in the context of demands for justice and peace but it can also be used for environmental, health and democratic pursues (Arendell, 2000). I will be basing my use of political motherhood on the definition of Jennifer Schirmer. Schirmer (1993) coined the term of political motherhood in her article on Latin American mothers' movements. It is a movement, she says, in which women incorporate traditional mother virtues like caring, compassion, and responsibility for the vulnerable into basic democratic norms. They go against the gendered division of these attributes by doing so. She also sees it as a progression of women gaining access to the public realm (Schirmer, 1993). In addition to this, Werbner (1999) argues that political motherhood by definition challenges the confinement of women in the domestic by moving them into the public domain.

It is through political motherhood, that women translated their compassionate element into ideological agendas and articulated them into the public space. Historically, political motherhood has been quite revolutionary both on women's own consciousness as on the law and political landscape they were used in. Because in both their own consciousness and their political landscape, women were often situated in the private sphere of the home (Werbner, 1999). Mhajne and Whetstone (2018) define political motherhood as "a maternal framing of woman's engagement with politics that makes use of traditional understandings of femininity and motherhood". There are global similarities in how women experience motherhood. It should therefore be noted that the exact maternal frame that is used depends on the specific context in which it is used (Carreon & Moghadam, 2015). Mothers can call attention to their own and their children's needs in communities where motherhood is highly valued. The strategy of political motherhood is especially effective in authoritarian societies that traditionally mark mothers and their bodies as sites that need state protection (Mhajne & Whetstone, 2018). It is in this context that women are seen as "hyper visible citizens that require special protection from the state (Amar, 2011)". This is also the case in Turkey, where women are seen as moral women, that deserve respect. But also, as vulnerable people in need of protection (Demirci-Yilmaz, 2017).

In short, political motherhood allows women from different social and political contexts to have access to the political spheres they were previously excluded from. They force this access through their maternal roles (Orhan, 2008). It might not seem political to promote a mother's caring role,

but when it is used to either enforce the state or defy it, it is. When women promote their own caring role, it allows them to enter the political space and to demand the state to end their violence against the mothers' children (Mhajne & Whetstone, 2018).

2.3.2. Use of Political Motherhood

There are two big variations of political motherhood. Each at the completely other end of the spectrum. According to Carreon and Moghadam (2015), how political motherhood is used is shaped by the context in which women's organizing takes place. On the one hand, there is passive political motherhood, which is state-led, top-down political motherhood. On the other hand, there is active political motherhood, which is bottom-up political motherhood led by activists. The kind of variation depends on the context in which political motherhood is formed which can be violent, revolutionary, transnational or as a consequence of environments of inequality. In this research I will be looking at a clearly violent context with a bottom-up political motherhood that challenges the state's top-down views of motherhood. Meaning that political motherhood can be used by the women themselves, but also by others. As we will see, the Turkish case represents both. The first is a passive use of motherhood, in which others apply their definition of motherhood to them. Based on, as Yuval-Davis (1997) describes their image as "biological and cultural reproducers of the nation, the state refers to women as 'mothers of the nation'". This is opposed to the active political motherhood, where women use it to empower themselves as political agents (Yuval-Davis, 1997). In this top-down use of political motherhood the nation is an imaginary family in which the men are responsible for defending the women and children in this type of symbolic parallel (Werbner, 1999).

On the other side is the active, self-use of political motherhood. Here, motherhood can be deployed in order to legitimize the participation of women in demonstrations and even protests that challenge the state (Mhajne & Whetstone, 2018). This kind of activism and political presence of women defies the top-down political motherhood that projects women and mothers as defenseless and in need of male and state protection (Yuval-Davis, 1993). Here, the women undercut the state's hypervisibility strategy by physically entering public space and consequently the public sphere. They cannot just dismiss the protests since the demonstrators are mothers, whom they have labeled as moral and respectful role models. However, this top–down use of political motherhood does not guarantee a free-pass for protection. As we will see later, it protects the mothers in the first instance, but it wears off rather quickly (Mhanje & Whetstone, 2018). In contexts of injustice

and inequality, political motherhood is used in order to challenge the traditional divide between the public and the private sphere. And even the mothers who see themselves in a more traditional light dismantle their de facto apolitical status by engaging in human rights protests (Demirci-Yilmaz, 2017). Because of the moral authority that mothers have due to their status as have as carriers and protectors of the nation and its identity. of the nation and its identity, political motherhood is quite effective. Political motherhood is shaped by a larger political context (Mhajne & Whetstone, 2018). Furthermore, thanks to the cross-cultural capacity mothers have, motherist movements have a large reach, as indicated previously in maternal activism. Meaning that motherhood is translated as an extensive commitment, not only to their own children, but also to other mothers and children regardless of class, status, and ethnicity (Ruddick, 1982). All these aspects make political motherhood a very effective strategy for women to take their place into the public sphere.

The Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo are one of the most well-known examples of political motherhood. Just as we will see in the Turkish context there is both top-down and bottom-up political motherhood that is used. The Saturday Mothers use traditional views of sacred motherhood to bring attention to their missing children and demand an end to enforced disappearances and state violence in general. They can do this because the state promotes the institution of motherhood and the values and importance of family in order to maintain political control in the private sphere (Mhanje & Whetstone, 2018). By using political motherhood, these women started bargaining with the patriarchy in order to accomplish a bigger access into the political sphere. They can bargain because of the positioning between the ideal of motherhood and the state's view on it. Aside from bargaining, mothers will use their position to protect protesters and even shame on the military and other state forces for carrying out the state ordered violence (Mhajne & Whetstone, 2018). They take a political role in a public arena they were previously excluded from in the absence of their husbands and sons (Chassen-López, 1997).

2.4. Origins in Feminism

2.4.1. Feminist Views

In a study concerning female activists it is inevitable to discuss the feminist viewpoint. Even though, I will keep this rather short because the link between feminism and political motherhood and maternal activism is a very contested one. As it has been made clear, both maternal activism and

political motherhood are initially gendered movements that lead to emancipation of women in the public sphere. Both terms also find their origins in feminism (Howe, 2006). Although maternal activism and political motherhood may have their origin in a feminist background, it does not make their place any less contested from both sides. On the one hand, some groups like the Saturday Mothers do not want to be seen as feminist, and on the other hand there is a lot of critique on maternalist activism in feminist literature (Howe, 2006). According to Howe (2006), many feminists are critical against a maternalist approach of feminism. It is being viewed as reducing the female subject solely to their role as mothers and confining them in it. This leads to political demands existing exclusively out of maternal qualities meaning basic needs such as justice, health and housing. But solely with an emphasis on needs in the private sphere (Howe, 2006).

The importance of maternal activism is still a point of contention among academics, as is whether it can even be called a component of the feminist movement (Karaman, 2020). When analyzing maternal activism as a feminist movement, academics specify three major viewpoints within this debate. The first viewpoint is that maternal activism indeed has a clear feminist agenda. This is argued by Nathanson (2008), stating that mothers' movements have a feminist agenda because of three reasons. One: It is an example of the core of feminist ideology 'personal is political'. Two: They defy traditional gender roles and power relations. Three: It upsets essentialist notions of motherhood by transforming it from an individual or isolated experience to a foundation and inspiration for large scale social change (Nathanson, 2008). However, there is the other end of the spectrum with scholars denying maternal activism as part of the feminist movement. Here, maternal activism groups are seen as groups who accept the traditional gender roles where women are associated with the domestic, using motherhood to participate in the public sphere. Only when they use motherhood as a strategy to fight for justice and democracy, they come closer to feminism (Ladd-Taylor, 1993). In this second view we can still see the Saturday Mothers of Turkey as a part of the feminist movement, as they fight for justice for their lost loved ones.

In the third view, the classification of maternal activism within feminism depends on the specific organization and whether it fulfills certain criteria. There is a difference between active and passive maternalism. In passive maternalism, mothers are represented as political symbols without acknowledging women's agency. They are defined only by their biological role. Active maternalism on the other hand uses motherhood as a strategy with the goal of participating in the public sphere and changing the meaning of motherhood (Gentry, 2009). This is just one of the many different classifications that have been made in this third view (Karaman, 2020). The most important one for

this research and the Saturday Mothers is the aspect of self-classification. Maternal activist groups who do not see themselves as feminists still can be classified as feminists, such as the Saturday Mothers who do not want to be seen as feminists (Karaman, 2020). Carreon & Moghadam (2015) argue that it is not a necessity. It is however more likely that mothers' groups serve feminist goals when it is supported by a feminist vision and has connections with other feminist organizations then when this is not the case. But when it is not, it does not necessarily mean that the group is not feminist (Carreon & Moghadam, 2015). This short overview shows that it is not easy to call a group or concept either feminist or not, even when they actively help women's emancipation.

2.4.2. The View from the other side

From the other side we can see that groups and individuals are not always interested in being considered feminists. Some groups, like the Saturday Mothers, even refuse being labeled feminists, not wanting to be associated with it (Karaman, 2018). Groups like this might not self-identify as feminists and even resist the label of feminists. But it cannot be denied that they gave a political meaning to motherhood and disrupted the borders and meanings of the division between the public and private sphere (Lister, 2003). Furthermore, they continue to oppose and challenge patriarchal systems on several levels, such as machismo culture, militarism, and state repression. Putting strong demands for justice on the state demonstrate the politicization of motherhood and women's connection to the family. The strategy of organizing women, particularly mothers, in public places, shifting the maternal from private to public, creates a sense of transformation that may or may not be well-received in traditional or patriarchal contexts, but it politicizes women's maternal identities and extends that politicization from the individual to the community, national, and global levels (Carreon & Moghadam, 2015). In general, most scholars do not see the Saturday Mothers as feminists (Karaman, 2020). They do however, acknowledge that they can have gender and feminist undertones. The Saturday Mothers changed the socially constructed gender roles and even the concept of the public space by the act of blurring the boundaries between the public and the private sphere. They have gained political consciousness because of their motherhood and have been politicized by their protests (Baydar & Ivegen, 2006).

In conclusion the main source of tension between feminism and maternal activism and politics is the possible potential that maternal movements have to enforcen traditional gender roles that keep women within the domestic (Demirci-Yilmaz, 2017). These essentialist notions of motherhood are the most problematic aspect of maternal activism and political motherhood as they have the power

to reduce women to the only role of motherhood (Demirci-Yilmaz, 2017). Maternal activist groups like the Saturday Mothers can be seen as representatives of a motherist tradition that enforces traditional gender roles in contrast with feminist movements who see this as restrictive (Howe, 2006). But neither group can deny that they have contributed a lot in expanding the political representation of women and in promoting human rights, including women's rights (Howe, 2006).

2.5. The Bigger Picture

As made clear above, these concepts should be placed in the bigger debate about the public and the private sphere. Movements that can be placed within these concepts of maternal activism and political motherhood are movements who defy and challenge the idea of a divide between the two and blur the gendered lines of who is placed on which side of that divide. However, the essence of the public sphere is not necessarily as gendered as it seems. One of the main theorists about the public space, Hannah Arendt (2013), defines the public space as the space where we appear to each other to discuss and interact. In contrast, the private of our homes is the space where power emerges. The public space is ultimately a political space (Arendt, 2013). This place of public appearance is controlled by the dominant political structures in each context (Torre, 1996). Benhabib (1992) elaborated on this, defining the public sphere in a broad sense as a political space where disputed issues are addressed. It is a flexible space that is always open to new topics, challenges, and discourses (Benhabib, 1992). The gendered division between public and private has confined women to the traditional feminine side, the private side, with housework, having children and caring for both children and the elderly as key goals. This division is rooted in the universal sexual asymmetry that connects the female to the private, and the male to the public, meaning the cultural, rational, and political. It is also on this distinction that the state will form its ideal of the mother (Orhan, 2008). Women are typically perceived as passive agents in political contexts, rather than involved subjects or agents. Women have the problematic status of being perceived an apolitical group. It is difficult to see how women can truly change political issues in this setting (Torre, 1996). The Saturday Mothers took a place in the public sphere by actively taking up public space. As we will see, this public space can be everywhere and not just in conventional political places. The mothers claimed alternative political spaces on the sidewalk of the public square where they were visible to everyone. They did this as they were not allowed in official buildings or assisted in police stations (Chassen-López, 1997).

Another bigger debate which can also placed within this case study on maternal activism and political motherhood is that of the authoritarian state. As we will see, we can see Turkey as a semi-authoritarian state. In order to keep the power, the state uses violence as a political strategy. The main strategy the state uses is that of enforced disappearances, a wildly used technique in authoritarian states, to remove political opposition. This type of violence that is executed by the state, lets the state decide over its subject's life and/or death. Achilles Mbembe (2019) defines this as "necro politics". A dark extension of Foucault's notion of bio-power (Gennel, 2006). What happened to the disappeared can be recognized in Giorgio Agamben's theory of "bare life". Those who were detained by the state are completely isolated and all their legal protections are taken away. "Bare life" is used to conceptualize between those who are seen as fully human within the state, meaning they can participate in the political life, and those without political rights. The groups who are subjected by the sovereign power into this form of "bare life" is generally a minority group within the state. (Agamben, 2008). In the Turkish case we can see a focus in the enforced disappearances on the Kurdish population in Turkey (Goral, 2013). The disappeared were taken away to never be heard of or seen again. They had no legal rights anymore whatsoever and were taken into a "state of exception", a temporary or permanent suspense of the state of law (Agamben, 2008). The ones who stayed behind, the wives and mothers, were already secluded in the private sphere, with no political power. With the disappearance of their loved ones this changed however, and they took to the streets. In this way the Saturday Mothers followed Arendt's (1969) notion of power, as she states that true power lies with the unity of people. As they come together to interact and share their ideas, the true power lies with them, not with the violent state, as violence has no constructive capacity (Arendt, 1969).

2.6. Conclusion

While the terms are frequently interchanged, I argue that there is a difference and that the one, maternal activism, leads to the other, political motherhood. However, this does not mean that there is no strong overlap. Maternal activism does not start out as a tactic to achieve political power, but rather as an individual expression of sorrow, wanting to know what happened to your children. The mothers who took to the streets to express the tragedies that happened to their children were not just following in their children's ideological footsteps. What brought them to protest was their grieving and fear for their children. It was the process and struggle that followed that transformed these women into political agents with a strong self-consciousness (Orhan, 2008). Political

motherhood does have the goal of gaining political power and changing the status-quo. Here, motherhood is used as a tactic to legitimize political goals. In both these concepts the role of the authoritarian state is very clear. The state and its use of enforced disappearances is a catalysator for groups of maternal activism and political motherhood to rise and stand up for their loved ones. It is these types of actions that lead to a shift in the strict dichotomy between the public and the private sphere.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This chapter elaborates on the methodology I developed to conduct my ethnographic research on the Saturday Mothers. First, I will discuss how I designed my research and literature review. Secondly, I will look at the different methods I used and why they are relevant for this research. Afterwards, I will focus on the practical and ethical elements of this research. In particular, how I made connections in Istanbul in order to conduct interviews and a participant observation and the ethical consideration of meeting and interviewing a group of activists in an active situation of ongoing conflict. Lastly, I will elaborate on how these different research methods fit into the models of maternal activism and political motherhood.

For the literature review I focused on feminist literature, literature considering maternalism, maternal activism and political motherhood in different forms. Accordingly, I also reviewed numerous research articles on the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, as they are the inspiration for the Saturday Mothers (Bejarano, 2002; Bouvard, 1994; Burchianti, 2004; Howe, 2006; Ramm, 2020; Schoellkopf, 2017, Taylor, 2001; Torre, 1996). The Abuelas are also a group that has been wildly researched in almost all aspects, including those of maternal activism. When it comes to literature about the Saturday Mothers itself it was challenging to find a substantial amount of English literature. While there is plenty written in Turkish, there is barely any research in English. Thus, as a possible solution, I looked mostly at master theses that were written in English, mostly at Turkish universities. The big advantage of this solution is that many of these theses' also used interviews as research method, for which large parts of those interviews were translated in English and published as quotes. These large quotes were, together with the theses, also a very big source of information. Nevertheless, I am aware as a researcher that, due to linguistical issues, this thesis cannot make use of a considerable amount of literature that specifically centers around the topic I

am researching. This loss should be taken into account while reading the literature review. In order to place this research in the bigger theoretical debates, I also looked at the public and private sphere and the authoritarian state, as the Saturday Mothers have had an influence on the public-private divide as we will see. Further I also followed the Saturday Mothers on Facebook and Twitter, these social media platforms are their main active arenas as the physical protests are currently forbidden. I had access to all their posts and weekly online protests in video form that were also uploaded on YouTube. These were all written and spoken in Turkish, but the posts were easily translated through online tools, even the videos who also had a Turkish transcription of what was being said.

Field work

In order to look at how the Saturdays Mothers saw themselves in terms of political actors and activists, I conducted participant observation, a groups discussion and both in person and digital interviews. The first step was making contacts in Istanbul. To do this I sent e-mails to all organizations and NGO's present in Istanbul that had worked with or around the Saturday Mothers according to their website. I did this once in English and another time in Turkish. I only got two responses, one of Amnesty International and one of the Human Rights Association (HRA). The Human Rights Association gave me the contact information of their Istanbul office, where the Saturday Mothers were located. On the e-mail then send directly to their office I never received an answer. Through the contact at Amnesty International, I got an interview with one of their employees who also worked closely with the Saturday Mothers. They also brought me in touch with Sebla Arcan, the main spokesperson of the Saturday Mothers and also a member of the Human Rights Association in Istanbul. All other contacts I made through personal connections in Istanbul also all led to Sebla. It was clear early on that Sebla was a key figure within the organization. Sebla invited me to their weekly gathering on Saturday to have interviews. The HRA also had a translator present as I do not speak any Turkish, the translator was also a member of the HRA. I was really relieved. Thankfully, I was able to conduct interviews, as the Saturday Mothers are an over-researched population in Turkey and were not always interested to participate in research after a couple of insensitive interviews that had happened before (Karaman, 2020).

For my Participant Observation I joined the weekly Saturday meetings. During these meetings I could see how the organization operated, what goals they had on a political level and how they planned to achieve those objectives. For an optimal Participant Observation, I would be present

during several of these meetings, but they only happen once a week and due to time constrictions as this is a one-year master's thesis, I was only able to stay in Istanbul for ten days, during this time I spend one full Saturday at the main HRA office. During this day I joined two meetings and was invited to join them for lunch. When I arrived at the Istanbul office of the HRA there were six people present and I was warmly greeted by everybody. I brought a plate of Turkish dried fruits as a thank you gift and an ice breaker which was much appreciated. When I arrived, the weekly meeting started with me introducing myself and my research with the help of my translator, Yidiz Zeynep. After the first greetings the meeting started as usual. The next protest post was discussed as well as the future plans and what was currently already happening. Afterwards I had an impromptu group discussion with 3 members of the HRA and 3 members of the Saturday Mothers. The Saturday Mothers I spoke to were all second and even third generation. Meaning that they are the children and grandchildren of the original members. The first generation started in 1995, so by 2020 the next generation largely took over due to age. This group discussion was semi-structured on the basis of my interview questions. When the discussion took an interesting turn, I followed up on that as the underling discussion of politics and their own self-identification in it was very interesting to me to see how they saw themselves as political actors. I also had an informal lunch at the office and had a few short interviews with members of both the HRA and the Saturday Mothers. At their request I send the longer version of the interview afterwards through mail, so they could answer it in their own time. The short interviews were semi-structured. I went deeper into the questions I had not asked during the group discussion. I also focused on their self-identification as political actors, meaning that their experiences where the main focus of the interview. Thus, I listened and let them tell their views and stepped in or followed up where needed. The questions I had sent through mail were in a more structed form, as all the questions that were written already written down. I also put in a few sub-questions in case of positive or negative answers on some bigger questions. When I left, I exchanged personal contact information with Sebla and Yildiz, in case I could help them with something when needed.

Role of the researcher

While I was doing research, I realized early on that there would be considerations to be made on both an ethical and sensitive level. First of all, the Saturday Mothers are an organization that is active in a particularly violent context. Additionally, I know they have previously had some bad experiences with interviews and researchers. When it comes to my positionality, I think my gender as a woman helped me get into this almost completely female organization relatively quickly and

easy. From the beginning, they were very warm and welcoming and they wanted to help me gather as much information as possible. The fear of them being an over-researched population, without interest in being interviewed very quickly went away. The fact that I was not from Turkey but from a country in Western Europe also seemed to help, as in the past they had not been interviewed by a student outside of Turkey a lot (Personal Communication, 23/04/2022). Once I told them I came to Istanbul solely for them they became even more open than they were before, and all the little remaining formalities seemed to melt away. They were very proud and thankful that there was attention in different countries for their cause and struggles. In the end, we also exchanged contact information so if they ever would need anything they would be able to reach me. For example, if there would be another international protest in support of the mother, they would have more contacts in Belgium.

Taking the ethical dilemmas I faced into account, the ones I struggled with the most were in Istanbul itself. These people who have been through so much violence and trauma seemed so grateful towards me for just being there and writing about them. I told them many times that I was the thankful one, and if there was anything I could do to please let me know. This was emotionally confronting. I did not record any interviews as there was an open and informal atmosphere. I took notes during the conversation and wrote them out completely the same day and the day after. When it comes to data to be processed there was sensitive information that was given in a casual conversation and I double checked if I could use it. Furthermore, at the start of every written digital interview one of the first questions was if the interviewed person wished to remain anonymous in my research.

4. Analysis

4.1. Contextual situation

4.1.1. Introduction

During my fieldwork, I spent an entire Saturday at the Istanbul office of the Human Rights Association. After a long morning of meetings, I was invited to lunch with them. At this point, there were only four of us present: Sebla who is the main spokesperson of the mothers and one of the second-generation mothers, Besna Tosun who is a woman whose father disappeared and also another member of the HRA, Yildiz who was the interpreter

during the interviews and had become the most recent member of the organization. It is important to note that this was during a light lunch after a lot of heavy discussions. So, the feeling in the room was more uplifting and relaxed than the moment before.We were talking about the good weather and some other small talk. It was the sunniest day of the week and with the windows open we heard the typical city life on the background. At one point, the conversation changed to Turkish and the three women were all laughing about something while clearly having a casual conversation. Then Yildiz turned to me and told me what they were talking about. In the meeting before, there had been a discussion about whether or not the physical protests would restart and how. The protests are banned and illegal for almost two years now at this point. The Saturday mother present said she was ready for it, but that they would have to wait for one more month until school ended so she could make arrangements for her kids when she was arrested or beaten. Then Sebla made a similar comment about the inconveniences of being arrested as she also had a conference to attend in a few weeks, so she also wanted to wait a bit. Yildiz, who had not been arrested, said she was a bit nervous and scared about it. To which the other women laughed and said that it is something you get used to. While this is obviously a very serious subject, I again want to stress that they were all visibly laughing during this conversation and said it on a funny, light-hearted tone like you would hear at your local pub when people are having some casual conversation about the weather and what happened during the day. Even when Yildiz told me this she still had a small grin on her face and Sebla, who also understands English, had to laugh again about the previous comments. To them this was all a part of normal life. The women could just laugh about this and just accept it as a given that they would be arrested and even beaten again. It shows just how "normal" they perceive being chased and beaten by the police. It has become a part of their life and struggle to the point they are not surprised by it anymore. This does not mean they are not afraid as shown by Yildiz her reaction. However, they are not just expecting the violence, they are prepared for it. It was also very clear that they would not be stopped by something as brutal as police violence. The protests and subsequent objectives are too important to all of them, even if it means they are physically harmed by it. I remember Yildiz telling me right after this story that she could see it might be weird they were laughing about something so serious like being beaten and arrested. I told her I somewhat understood that laughing about these matters is sometimes on of the only things you can do. Of course, I could not even imagine nor fathom what they had been through, but I truly respected the way they handled everything. They really seemed to appreciate this as well.

Afterwards, the conversation just continued in this light-hearted manner for the rest of the lunch.

(Participant Observation, Istanbul, 23rd of April 2022)

To completely comprehend what the Saturday Mothers do, who they are, and what they have already accomplished, it is necessary to comprehend the complex context in which they should be viewed. The Saturday Mothers arose from a variety of circumstances that brought them together for the first time on the 27th of May 1995, at noon on Galatasaray Square in front of the high school (Karaman, 2016). I will briefly discuss the 1980 coup, the Kurdish Question, and the widespread usage of enforced disappearances in this chapter.

4.1.2. The 1980 coup and the Kurdish Question

Toköz (2015) describes Turkey as a semi-authoritarian state since the coup of 12 September 1980. A semi-authoritarian state has elements from both a democratic and an authoritarian state. Regarding the latter, the ruler wants to appear as a democratic ruler but he is in fact not democratic. There are a few 'official' democratic institutions, but they hold no real power and do not form any sort of competition for the actual ruler. As we will see very clearly in the Turkish case, there is also no form of accountability for the government (Olcott & Ottaway, 1999). After the military coup of 1980 there was a new military government formed. This new government forbade other political parties and started a repressive regime characterized by political violence. This had an enormous negative impact on civil and political rights with over 60 000 people arrested for alleged illegal political activity and terrorism between 1980 and 1983, the period when the military government was in power (Tökoz, 2015). And even though the military regime ended in 1983, it left behind a culture of impunity that has remained entrenched in Turkey (Göral, 2013).

It is against this background starting in the early 1980s that the ethno-political issue of the Kurdish question developed that would shape the coming decades in Turkey. In 1984, the military power of the PKK (the Kuristan Workers Party) also became apparent. Despite this, the official discourse of the Turkish state was still based on demeaning the PKK by stating that the party was not significant and existed only out of a handful of people (Göral, 2013). By the early 1990's, this image soon caught up with reality. This reality consisted of an increase in the Kurdish legal and political field supported by Kurdish intellectuals and notable figures. Most crucially, with the establishment of

HEP (the People's Labour Party) in 1990, a formal entry of the PKK and the Kurds into the political arena with a demand for Kurdish rights was made. In addition, there was widespread sympathy for the PKK's guerrilla activity, prompting the government to shift its strategy. In this new strategy the Turkish state implemented a state of emergency (OHAL) in the east of Turkey, where the largest part of the Kurdish population was located. This was also the region where the PKK was most active. This became known as the OHAL region and was under martial law throughout the 1980's and 1990's, although there are differences in when it was lifted in different provinces (Göral, 2013). This reality made the entire region a state of exception as described by Agamben (2008). During this time the OHAL government was given extremely broad powers over the population including aspects such as education, food provision, communication and where they were allowed to settle (Göral, 2013). It is in this region that most of the enforced disappearances happened as a way to fight the guerrilla movement (Goker, 2011). These practices of enforced disappearances continued also after the military government. The formations within the state that were responsible that the deep state could operate without any kind of supervision or accountability which was further facilitated by the post-coup militarist climate. The deep state refers to the secrecy around the disappearances in Turkey. It entails the multiple levels of connection from the state with police, (para)military groups and political and economic elites. However, we must look at this deep state as a historical and a definitive dimension of power, and not only connect it to a certain group in a certain period of time (Ahiska, 2014). Since 12 September 1980, there have been an estimated 1353 occurrences of enforced disappearances. These disappearances mainly took place between 1991 to 1999 with the three-year period between 1993 and 1996 as the most intense one (Göral, 2013).

4.1.3. Enforced Disappearances

We can observe the first-time use of mass enforced disappearances on a massive scale during the Second World War (Göral, 2013). The goal of enforced disappearances is to make opponents disappear into oblivion, as if they never even existed. Arendt (1964) argues that this will never work. The holes of oblivion simply do not exist. As there will always be one person left to tell their tale (Arendt, 1964).

In Turkey,enforced disappearances are mostly referred to as '*kayıp*' meaning missing or '*gözaltında kayıp'* wich means missing under custody (Göral, 2013). During my interviews, my translator always

used the term missing under custody as well when describing what happened to the family members of the mothers. This can be explained in the Turkish context by the fact that the people who disappeared were often taken away during the day from their home, work or even the street, often with witnesses present. When the family went to the police station, they were initially told by the public officials that they were either lost under custody or would be released the next day after their statement was taken (Göral, 2013). However, I will continue to use the term enforced disappearances as it clearly refers to the use of force. It also shows that the disappearances also not only happen by being taken into custody first. They could also happen by simply picking people up of the street, without disguising it as an arrest. The most well-known definition of enforced disappearances is that of The United Nations' International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICCPED). They define enforced disappearance as: "the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by the concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law" (OHCHR, 1992). In this definition the so-called deep state is also responsible for the cases of enforced disappearances that were conducted through all kinds of para-military groups. (Ahiska, 2014). Also denying information after the disappearance falls under this definition.

As stated above most of the disappearances happened in the OHAL region (state of emergency region) in the South-eastern provinces of Turkey (Goker, 2011). Aside from the OHAL region, the cities of Istanbul and Adana stand out as the two other places where enforced disappearances took place on a large scale. In these two cities it was again mostly local leaders, politicians or otherwise notable members from the Kurdish people that disappeared. Otherwise, in these cities outside the OHAL region journalists, leftist activists, students and militants as well as figures who voiced a local democratic public opinion also belonged to the group of disappeared people. In short, people out of all different ranks of political opposition disappeared out of these cities during the 1990's. As stated before, most of these disappearances happened between 1993 and 1996 (Göral, 2013).

4.2. Mothers, Mourning and Morals

4.2.1. Formation of the mothers

"Don't forget, only justice heals."
(Cumartesi Anneleri, 2022).

The Saturday Mothers came together for the first time because of the case of Hasan Ocak. This happened after the tortured body of Hasan Ocak was found in an anonymous mass grave, 58 days after he disappeared in Istanbul (Göral, 2003). Hasan was taken by the police on the 21th of March 1995 and his body was found on the 19th of May 1995 (Ivegen, 2004). Before his body was found, Emine Ocak, the mother of Hasan, went to all the possible official authorities. She was beaten up by the police for going to the office of the governor and she brought numerous flowers to the active ministers in order to get their attention. She was even imprisoned for 19 days after being detained for disturbing the peace in court when she went to see a judge (Goker, 2001). It was during this loud and public search of Emine Ocak, that the mothers started to meet. They saw that their individual attempts did not work and decided to band together in order to find their children, but also to make the continuous happening of enforced disappearances known to the public (Orhan, 2008). The other women also looked for their children or husbands in the same way. First, they each sought for their own, independent from one another. But while they worked separately, the places where they voiced their distress for the disappeared were the same. After all, the disappearances all happened in the same way. The children were taken, often with witnesses present. When the mothers went to police offices, hospitals, the offices of the public prosecutor and even morgues, they denied the disappearance and sent them away, without keeping a record of the mother's ongoing search for their husbands and children (Orhan, 2008). This meant the general action to search for their children was also similar as they all went to police stations and public offices for hours on end. It is in this manner that they became acquainted, while waiting for information in those same police stations (Orhan, 2008). Together with some members of the Human Right Association they decided to take action after Hasan Ocak his body was found, and to demand more information (Karaman, 2016).

Thus, on the 27th of May 1995, the Saturday Mothers took to Galatasaray square for the first time and put the existence of enforced disappearances in Istanbul on the public agenda (Göral, 2003). They decided it had to be a Saturday, because a substantial amount of people would be present at noon. Journalists could quickly take notice and write about it (Goker, 2011). They decided on Galatasaray Square because of its position in Istiklal Street. Istiklal Street is one of the busiest streets in Istanbul as an average of 1 million people pass through every day (Eurocities, 2020). Galatasaray Square is the center of the street where all the political activities and institutions are located. Galatasaray High School and Galatasaray Post Office are the two primary structures. It was in that same post office that many women posted letters to the government concerning the

disappearance of their children. This gave the location an emotional meaning from the start (Kocabçak, 2003). This square was chosen because it is a crowded, central location and more importantly, it has a very diverse demography including many tourists, meaning the possibility of catching immediate attention of the international society. The street has a very active community with many organizations and establishments present (Kocabıçak, 2003). With the first protest, the police did not know what to do or how to respond. Back then, Galatasaray was not used to encounter protests. By now, this has also changed (Goker, 2011). During the interviews, the women joked that it was now needed to make a reservation to protest on Galatasaray square on a Saturday. thanks to them, the square became the key place to protest in Istanbul (Personal Communication, 23/04/2022).

The first meeting lasted half an hour instead of the planned full hour. Around 30 people came together, consisting out of family members of the disappeared and other human right defenders (Göral, 2003). Afterwards they went to the nearest tea or coffee house in order to discuss the plans for the next week. And so, the movement was born. It was in that coffee and tea house where they decided to make a press statement each week, as it was allowed by the law and could form the legal basis they needed. The idea of adding the victims' pictures to make them present during the meetings also emerged at that moment (Orhan, 2008). About this first meeting Sebla Arcan, member of the Human Rights Association and current spokesperson for the Saturday Mothers, wrote: "Our number was low and we did not make any noise so we were treated as the "Saturday Fools." But the arrests started when our actions started to take effect" (Goker, 2011). From then on, they would meet in a nearby tea or coffee house after the sit-in, discuss the next steps and divide the work. The mothers would write a press release about the disappeared and someone would read one aloud at the end of the vigil (Goker, 2011). Hasan Ocak has become the symbol of the disappeared (Orhan, 2008). His brother, Ali Hacan, is still active in the Saturday Mothers organization. When I spoke with him, he told me they were one of lucky ones, as they actually found a body (Personal Communication, 23/04/2022). According to him only around 5 bodies in total have been found. While all hope for his brother was already lost, his mother and one of the initiators were present at that very first meeting, demanding for truth (Personal communication, April 23, 2022).

Since then, they came together for 200 consecutive weeks in a silent action with always the same demand: "Those missing under custody be found, and those responsible be tried." During this period the enforced disappearances continued but less and less over time. The efforts to repress

the protests, on the contrary, became bigger so they would not get any more attention (Göral, 2003). The Saturday Mothers reached a critical year in 1998, when the leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan was found in Italy. This led to ultranationalists sentiments and everyday violence. In this light the police took extreme measures to stop the mothers from gathering in Galatseray Square (Goker, 2011). Thus, from the 170th week the excessive police violence started asthere were hundreds of police present to surround the 40 to 50 group of elderly women. On the Saturdays before the police kept the interfering with the protests to just informing them the protests were illegal, blocked the meeting space with cards and started a public campaign against them saying they were crazy and liars (Orhan, 2008). However, from August 1998, the police changed their strategy, and the mothers were beaten, dispersed by pepper gas, and dragged by their hair to the police vehicles. There was a disproportionate use of violence and the Mothers were arrested en masse (Orhan, 2008). The members who still came to the protests were beaten, dragged through the streets and arrested and detained up to 5 days. Their legitimacy was at this point not an issue to the public due to the longlivety of their protests. So, the official reason for the repression of their protests was that it was an undercover operation of illegal terrorist organizations. At this point, the police arrested "anyone that looked suspicious" even before they entered the square (Ivegen, 2004). The protest that has started out as one that everybody could join was now one that could only be joined by those who could risk the violence and arrests. The Saturdays on the square became an environment of terror with masked police and police dogs. Jobs and health were risked and fear reigned of what would happen to their other children. This effort to silence the women took on the form of such extreme police violence that the Mothers paused their actions on the 13th of March, 1999. They did make a statement saying that "For us, Galatasaray Square is everywhere, we will continue the search for our disappeared" (Göral, 2003).

Even when the vigils were suspended there was still collective and individual contact (Goker, 2011). And after a ten-year gap, the Mothers became active again in January 2009. Hanim Tosun, a Saturday Mother, said that if they could have continued there would not have been more disappearances, talking about two more disappearances in 2001 (Goker, 2011). The Mothers and many others believe that their first goal was reached, as the number of disappearances went down significantly since the Mothers became active. As will be shown later, there have been no new recorded enforced disappearances since 2011 (Personal Communication, 23/04/2022). They restarted their activities to completely stop the practice of enforced disappearances, but also following the Ergenekon trials that started the year before. In these trials many people, including military leaders, were accused of plotting against the government. The Saturday Mothers

demanded that the crimes done to their loved ones were also included in the charges (Toksöz, 2015). Toksöz' (2015) respondents stated that when they restarted, they did not have any fear. They believed that time had changed and with the new government also the political environment had changed. Nonetheless, they also stated that the repression had also restarted with the protests. They were still trying to silence them (Toksöz, 2015). As made clear above, there is no doubt for the HRA that the violence and arrests will happen again as soon as the Saturday Mothers meet on Galatasaray Square again in the current timeframe (2022). But, in the absence of bodies and information Galatasaray square had become a space of commemoration, a symbolical graveyard, where they could remember and share their common pain (Goker, 2011). Therefore, the Saturday Mothers will not accept another place as alternative. The Square is their place of remembrance. Thus it must and shall be on Galatasaray Square (Personal communication, 23/04/2023).

4.2.2. Protected Identity of the mothers

As stated in the chapter on maternal activism, the Saturday Mothers could initially protect themselves based on the state-protected identity of motherhood. Karaman (2018) states that all nationalist discourses can be seen as gendered discourses. The female body is shaped as the signifier of a nation over which various struggles are waged. Within these kinds of discourses women took a place as biological reproducers of nations and transmitters of the national culture. As mentioned before this can also be seen in Turkey. In the eyes of the Turkish state the mother has carefully constructed a strong image. Womanhood and, more specifically, motherhood have also been heavily politicized through the dominant patriarchal-nationalist state discourse. Within the Turkish population, motherhood is associated with the activity of raising proper Turkish citizens who are willing to sacrifice their lives for the unity of the Turkish nation and country. Women who are conform to this definition raise their children as proper children and followers of the state. They are included into the categories of motherhood and even citizenship. However, those who do not, meaning those who do not follow the state's narrative and raise political dissidents, are excluded (Karaman, 2018). These requirements of what makes a good mother are well known among the Saturday Mothers. During a group discussion (Istanbul, 23/04/2022) they told me:

> *"We are not good mothers for the state. The total regime demands we stay in the house. That we stay at home and raise our kids to be good citizens, to be perfect kids. This is what the state wants the people to do. We are just birth givers that should raise our kids so that*

they will fight for the state. With fight for the state is meant that they should behave as perfect Turkish citizens and follow the political dominant discourse, and not support for example, Kurdish activist groups. Otherwise, we have to keep quiet. A mother with kids who will fight for the state is a perfect mom. But we don't want that, we want our kids to be alive, not died for the state."

These requirements became clear to them after they started taking to the streets in order to find out what has happened to their loved ones. With now the second and third generation of mothers taking over the movement, this has become common knowledge that they try to show the world. The Saturday Mothers, however, have completely turned around this narrative of silent mothers with good children. By showing the other side of this image, namely what happened to their children, they went against the state in one way or another. And what happens when they do not keep silent any longer. Instead of supporting the state, they demand the bodies, lives and peace back of those who were taken away from them by state violence. Instead of producing proper Turkish citizens, they gave birth to "dissidents" and even defended their rights. This meant they could not be proper mothers or citizens, hence excluding them from the basic rights that other normal citizens did in fact have (Karaman, 2018).

However, the Saturday Mothers combine multiple identities. On the one hand that of traditional motherhood and on the other hand that of the resistor. Before they started being activists, they were the traditional mothers, they all had similar experiences and problems that are traditionally common among women. These experiences mostly entail the life around their household. When they picked up the identity of resistor it was almost always their first participation in the social and political sphere. It is in this first period of time that this dual identity became visible. They state they were there as mothers in the first place, not as political activists. The role they believed in and that they acted to was that of a housewife and a mother to their children. Before the disappearances they did not fight the system in a public place, but they contributed to it in their houses by following the systems rules around motherhood as they stated in interviews with Kocabıçak (2003). This dual identity has become less obvious over time. The people I have spoken to were all in the second or third generation of mothers. Meaning they fought for their brothers, fathers, or uncles. This also meant that they, at least partially, grew up in this movement. They still fight for their loved ones, they fight for all those who disappeared, they are mothers and family member to all (Kürüm, 2012). But they are also resistors and in all my interviews (Istanbul, 23/04/2022 & digital interviews) they

all identified themselves as human rights activists as well, stating that they fight for everybody in Turkey.

Hence, at the beginning of their demonstrations police violence was not a problem yet. It was relatively easy for the mothers to create a public forum because as mothers, they were naturally presumed as a non-political group. There were some reactions however against the mothers, calling them liars and singing the national anthem against them, as a symbol that they saw the mothers as a group against Turkey. These difficulties were expected by the Mothers as there was a general dislike of dissonance in Turkey. Because of this any acts of protests were often met with distrust (Goker, 2011). However, no-one actually physically attacked them because they still fell under the category of motherhood which was considered as a traditional sacred status in Turkey. This status is what protected the mothers long enough to organize and become stronger in a country where all opposition is met with a number of problems to maintain their existence. Because it was culturally perceived to be 'immoral' to harm women, the public image of mothers consists of them being naturally weaker than men and thus in need of protection of those men. They deserve this protection because they could become mothers. Because of this the police initially did not know what to do with the mothers: punish them for not being proper mothers or following the existing notion that as mothers they deserve protection and respect (Goker, 2011). Therefore, the initial actions taken against the mothers were much more peaceful, for example the bus of disappeared and suggested relocation. This bus would park in the square and well-dressed female police officers would tell them to report the missings -even though they already had several times - or the chief of the Istanbul police suggested them to just go somewhere else, a lot less central, as if all they wanted was a meeting place (Goker, 2011). Obviously, this did not last long as their image of "non-political-miserable- mothers" was quickly countered by the state and the media (Karaman, 2016). This quick popularization of the Saturday protests, also meant that the police quickly became more violent (Goker, 2011), meaning this protected image of the mothers had changed rapidly.

This was accomplished when the political authorities and several media outlets started to change their image to of the Mothers being dangerous people who supported and birthed terrorists, meaning they were unworthy of protection and even respect. This propaganda started a public discussion that terrorists had manipulated the mothers, and this challenged the mothers' traditional image in the public opinion. This was enough to change the opinion of them as mourning mothers to terrorist mothers or even terrorists in general. Supporting the mothers became the same as supporting terrorists (Kocabiçak, 2003). This shows a very strong influence of the state on the

public just by linking them to assumed terrorists and portraying them as liars. As such, they were very quickly stripped of their protected status. This effectively canceled out all the previous mentioned protection that the armor of motherhood had to offer. Once this was achieved the state forces, mainly police, started with trying to stop them at all costs, this included beatings, arrests, teargas, rubber bullets, trials, etc. (Karaman, 2016). The control exercised in Istiklal Street, where the protests took place, was of immense proportions. Istiklal street is one of the busiest streets in Istanbul; Being the home to a lot of public protests, this has led to continuous presence of the Taksim police in the street and special police forces to swiftly end “disturbances”, being called ‘cevik kuvvet’ (swift forces) in Turkish (Kocabıçak,2003). There is also a permanent police presence on the mothers’ square, a part of the square is permanently barricaded with large fences. Inside these fences are police dogs and police vehicles parked (Istanbul, 04/2022). According to the mothers this is specifically aimed to hinder and stop them. When walking through the street there are always at least two armed vehicles present and several different sorts of police groups patrolling the streets. Either in full uniform or with an orange, fluorescent vest with the word police on it. Further, the mothers told me in the group discussion (Istanbul, 23/04/2022) that there are many undercover agents in the street as well. As soon as the Mothers enter, even just to go shopping, they are followed by two agents in black long-sleeved t-shirts. I have not personally seen these undercover agents, but everybody at the table knew exactly, based on the description, who they were talking about. As stated, the violence and subsequent arrests have been continuous since the 171st sit-in during this particular sit-in, on 15th of August 1998, there were 26 people arrested, by the following week this number increased to approximately 160 (Ivegen, 2004). The Saturday Mothers started to anticipate the arrests to the point they brought a small suitcase to the protests, in case they had to spend a few days in prison (Orhan, 2008).

4.2.3. The Saturday Mothers a Maternal Activists

As shown above, the mothers thus emerged as activists out of their maternal position in order to make claims for their children, with their unifying factor being mothers looking for those children (Orhan, 2008). As most motherist movements, the Saturday Mothers emerged in a disorganized fashion. This was because they had an immediate reaction to violence, and their actions were quick in efforts to try protecting and save their child. In other words, there was not enough time to thoroughly organize themselves (Orhan, 2008). By coming together in this manner, they transformed pain into a public issue. Pain is usually seen as an individual and solitary thing, but by coming together and mourning on the streets together it became visible for the whole world to see

(Orhan, 2008). The protests initially were based on maternal pain, not politics. One of their strengths was that it were women from all different classes, ethnicities and social backgrounds. After all, the people who disappeared were also not just Kurds. Those who disappeared were forcefully because of their political interests, not because of their ethnicity (Orhan, 2008). They came together because of one common problem. For this reason, they did not allow other groups to put political agendas into their protest. Others can sit with them, but in silence and for the same cause. But they did not limit themselves to solely their own child or loved one. the goal was making the large scale-enforced disappearances public. They turned it into a larger concern, that over time turned political (Orhan, 2008). They saw their identity as mothers as the most important element that legitimizes their resistance. The state could look at their children as terrorists or anarchists, but to them they were their sons. Therefore, their demands were not political, but a natural response rooted in their maternal roles that were supported by the state. By articulating the pain of losing a child, they spoke to the public and asked for help on a very emotional level (Orhan, 2008). Ironically, the Saturday Mothers never intended for it to be a mothers' event. It was the media who gave the name. But on a pragmatic level, the title of mothers was helpful, gaining them wider acceptance and an empathic response. Mourning was, and is still, connected to the identity of a mother and a very gendered given. This led to the name quickly being accepted by the Mothers, who incorporated it completely into their movement (Goker, 2011). Baydar and Ivegem (2006) even argue that the attention given by the state and the media was an effort to put the focus on the maternal identity in order to take away attention from the political goals of the mothers and focus on their emotions. This was not very useful however as the emotional was the building stone of the political goal. They are completely intertwined. Furthermore, emotions are not purely feminine, fathers and brothers also cried at these gatherings (Goker, 2011).

From the beginning they decided that their demands and claims had to be clear and simple. The only thing that mattered about the missing was that they had disappeared. Their ethnic, political, religious, or cultural identities were not important. Even though it was later used by the state to delegitimize the mothers and their actions. They insisted in this principle of simplicity to prove they had a legitimate claim. For this same reason they also did not use slogans or banners, so anyone could join them regardless their political and cultural background. "They used silence to have their voices heard" is an often-used sentence to describe the actions of the mothers (Goker, 2011). The initial aim of the vigils was two-fold. On the one hand to stop the enforced disappearances and on the other hand to learn the whereabouts of those who already disappeared. According to the people

I interviewed, this first goal was reached in 2011, since then there have been no new reports of enforced disappearances. As mentioned above, there was indeed a decline in cases of enforced disappearances after the Mothers started protesting, though apparently the practice was still used until 2011 (Personal Communication, 23/04/2022). The second goal, namely learning the whereabouts of the disappeared, evolved over time to what has happened to them, and where they are buried. Now over 27 years later, the hope of finding them alive is gone (Personal Communication, 23/04/2022).

While the first vigils were a small and informal event, it quickly grew to an impressive phenomenon. Over time more relatives and families of other disappeared joined the gatherings, and some even migrated to Istanbul from their hometown to join. It is during these protests that they create a network. Meeting people with the same pain empowered them (Göral, 2003). More and more people spoke of the vigils and soon the square was filled with journalists (Goker, 2011). At this point, the Saturday Mothers' protests were even regarded as the longest act of civil disobedience in Turkish History. This was made more impressive because they already achieved this title at the four-year mark. Now over 27 years later, they are still active (Goker, 2011). Civil disobedience is described as illegal in the sense that all legal channels have been exhausted, and when they have failed, the focus shifts to more informal means of achieving justifiable demands. Other characteristics of civil disobedience include the rejection of violence and the fact that it is an open, public act (Orhan, 2008). All these things apply to the Saturday Mothers. Ashas been mentioned earlier, they initially tried all legal means of receiving information, and when this failed, they began demonstrating peacefully in a crowded public place by simply sitting down. The sit-ins did not even use slogans. The only thing that was being told was the story of one of their loved ones. In a country where there is no freedom of speech for everyone, the Saturday Mothers as political agents bring attention and criticize this lack of civil rights by being “loudly” silent. As Karaman (2018) states, silence is being used as a political weapon. Silence without slogans makes the vigil open to families of all political background to share it on common ground. Two: silence is a meaningful component in a political protest. Their public silence stands symbol for the silence that the state forced onto the mothers, their disappeared family members, and their own silence as they do not reveal information about the disappeared or admit any form of involvement. The only words that are spoken are the weekly press statements about a disappeared child, about his life, his disappearance and updates on the development of his case (Alici, 2021). For the rest of the protest, the Mothers and their allies sit in silence, holding up the pictures of their loved ones and holding a red flower, a Karanfil, that is traditionally laid on a grave (Personal Communication, 23/04/2022).

While the state tried to obliviate these people, by not keeping any records of the disappearances nor of the complaints of the Mothers and denying the subsequent arrests the Saturday Mothers nonetheless achieved to negate their efforts (Kürüm, 2012); They almost created an alternative reality, one where their loved ones became public figures, alive in an almost haunted presence (Ahiska, 2014).

The Saturday Mothers see themselves as collective mothers, meaning mothers of all victims of state violence, living and dead. As such, the mothers perform motherhood as a politicized female identity in addition to being purely a relationship of kinship. This new form of motherhood came out of their collective and public actions. But what brought them initially together was the common extreme pain from the loss of family members. It is this pain and the link of it to motherhood that legitimized their protests in the eyes of the public (Orhan, 2008). Over the years of action and with support of several human rights organizations such as the HRA and Amnesty International their set of goals has expanded. Their current goals are clearly formulated on their social media accounts (Cumartesi Anneleri, 2022):

> *"Our demands are: Transform the system's legal, administrative and judiciary, which produces impunity and injustice! End politics of impunity and unveil crimes against humanity and the perpetrators! Uncover all investigations of our offspring's to the public and put all perpetrators on trial! Provide legal assurance of our right to truth and justice! We know if we cannot establish a free, equal, fair and humane future for our offspring, justice and truth will remain far from us. We know that we can only gain access to our offspring in a democratic and peaceful environment." (Cumartesi Anneleri, 2022).*

In these new goals the increased ambition of the Saturday Mothers is clear. They no longer only search for their children but aim for clearly established political goals such as a transformation on the level of the state, an end to the era of impunity and a right to justice for all.

4.3. The evolution of The Saturday Mothers

4.3.1. The Emergence of Political Motherhood

One of the first thing to consider when looking at political motherhood is the image of the mother in the relevant society. In Turkey the national discourse puts mothers on a moral pedestal. They are considered the mothers of the nation, characterized by self-sacrifice and altruisms. Because of this they are held in high esteem, but this does not place them on the same level as men in society (Ahiska, 2006). In fact, being a mother and having children is the main duty of women to the nation. With an image of the nurturing, diligent mother who takes care of the home there is a clear emphasis on traditional gender roles (Goker, 2016). Current president Erdogan has also clearly stated in the past that mothers are apolitical beings in a speech (Goker, 2006): *"Mothers do not hold ideologies, they are not politicized; they are not Leftist nor rightist." ("sehit anneleri bulustu" 2009).* By saying so, he enforces the place of mothers in the private sphere and confirms their seemingly apolitical status in the Turkish society. Obviously by protesting the state violence their children had fallen victim to, the mothers were no longer traditional mothers in the eyes of the state as we have seen above. They were no longer passive, but they did manage to keep up their altruistic image. After all, the reason they took to the streets was out of maternal devotion to their children. The Saturday Mothers used this as a shield, while at the same time transforming it (Orhan, 2008). By their demands that the state should be held responsible for and accountable to its citizens, mothers changed the traditional mother role. In other words, political considerations should include private matters and vice versa (Arat, 1998). This sentiment was mentioned earlier in the feminist discussion.

According to Kocabçak (2003) most of the Saturday Mothers have stated in their interviews that they had no political life whatsoever before they joined the Saturday Mothers. They were mostly aware that their husbands had a political life. Several Mothers have indicated that they had no idea that political dissidents were taken by the state and disappeared. It was only after they disappeared that they heard and learned about all of this. Göker (2011) confirms this, stating that out of her interviews it became clear that before becoming activists, they were mostly confined to housework and devoting their lives to their children. They were completely locked away from the public world. Let alone that they knew of institutional and legal procedures, how to make statements to the press and organize mass meetings. They transformed by taking part in the struggle. It was thus only during the struggle for their children that they created a political consciousness. And because this

politicization process was so short and so intense, it became a permanent consciousness (Kocabçak, 2003). After attending the protests for a while, they became more and more aware of all the political problems in Turkey. They learned this by talking to others who had been through similar experiences. This consciousness is a political identity they adopted. In Kocabçak her interviews it is been clear that they were no longer only interested in the problems of their children, but all sorts of other political problems as well. They stated that even if their own children would never be found, their protests could make sure others will not suffer in the same way as they have. They hence believed in the need for struggle. The traditional identity of mother or housewife has partly transformed and became part of the political. This does not mean that they completely gave up their identity as mother during this process, the political was simply added as a new layer to their identity (Orhan,2008). In an interview with Kocabçak (2003) a mother stated that she did not go to the protests to make politics. After all, she "said no good would happen out of my politics after her age. But you can see the right and wrong. You have to see." In this you can see her involvement in politics and attempts at protecting the innocent. This shows that the mothers have dual identities. That of political actors and that of the care-giving mothers. While they do not fit in the traditional model of either actor, they broke the strict division between the public and private sphere by holding onto their motherhood identities next to their newly adopted political identity (Ivegen, 2004). This proves that they have become a prime example of political motherhood.

4.3.2. Their place in the Public Sphere

Because of their actions, the Saturday Mothers have had an influential impact on the private-public dichotomy in the Turkish state. As stated in the chapter on the conceptual framework, the public sphere is controlled by the dominant political structures, each within their own context (Torre, 1996). This is thus the Turkish context where the public realm is masculine and belongs to nationhood (Ivegen, 2004). Usually, the street is seen as a site and even a symbol of politics and democratic protest, where people can come together and discuss their political debates freely in a public place just as Arendt (2013) describes the public sphere. In the Istanbul context, Kocabıçak (2003) argues that the police have made claims to the street, in order to stop this democratic act from happening. In the case of the Saturday Mothers, they claimed the public sphere by physically entering a public space, namely the Galatasaray square in Istiklal street. Aside from adding the enforced disappearances to the public and political agenda they also became part of the public space and subsequently of the public sphere, simply by taking their grievances onto the street in addition, they also started active political participation in those streets (Orhan, 2008). It is in this spatial aspect

that we see a first result of the Saturday Mothers' activism. This result is the visible duality of the Istiklal street in Istanbul as it is a site that is being controlled with strategies of discipline and surveillance in order to prevent the street of becoming a place of discussion. But as mentioned earlier, it is thanks to the mothers that the street, and more specifically Galatasaray Square, has been utilized as public space to protest and talk politics (Kocabıçak, 2003). When you walk through Istiklal street and Galatasaray Square, there is a continuous police presence. During my time in Istanbul I saw two protests start up in the timespan of a week. In both cases armed police was at the site in a matter of minutes and the protesters taken away in police buses shortly after (Personal Observation, April 2022). This shows how, thanks to the weekly meetings, the Saturday Mothers have changed the Turkish public sphere. They did this by using the strategic neutrality and the strong emotive language that is linked to motherhood (Karaman, 2018).

Another aspect of the public sphere that the Saturday Mothers have influenced is that of the gendered public-private divide by coming into the public sphere as women. The emergence of the women into the political sphere based on their maternal roles was a spontaneous one. It came almost as a side effect from looking for their children (Orhan, 2008). This does not take away that stepping out into the public was a big step for them. They stepped out of their comfort zone. After all, this divide was not only a form of external oppression towards the women, but also a highly internalized imposition (Ivegen, 2004). As seen in the chapter on political motherhood, most of the Saturday Mothers saw themselves as housewives and apolitical persons. By stepping into the public, they made a drastic change to their own lives as well. The protests brought the private life of the Saturday Mothers in confrontation with the state. They challenged the boundary by bringing the private, their emotions, motherhood and bodies, into the public sphere and used them as political tools (Goker, 2011). The Mothers further blurred the public-private dichotomy by bringing objects from the private into the public. More specifically, the photographs of their children and other objects that symbolize their children. These objects feel like very private but are brought into the public as a form of resistance (Orhan, 2008) In other words they used their private identities as mothers to create their public identities as political mothers.

4.3.3. (Inter-)National Human Rights Activists

The Saturday Mothers no longer followed an individual case of a loved one, instead they became activists of a larger social issue and even other injustices (Orhan, 2008). They did this with the help

from human right organizations. At the start, they were political undeveloped and unorganized. The Human Rights Association helped them with their goals and came to sit with them (Kocabçak, 2003). Through their actions and silence, they brought the attention to Turkey's open secret, being a country at war with itself (Umut, 1997). The Saturday Mothers have evolved to human rights activists, fighting for all who have fallen victim to state violence and to end this violence altogether. As they grew in popularity and importance it became impossible for the state to keep ignoring the Mothers outside of the police repression that had already happened. This led to a meeting with the government. Erdogan, then Prime Minister, had a meeting with the Saturday Mothers in 2011, only a year after he claimed to never have heard of them, or not even knowing what they did. After this meeting followed an initiative which was announced by then President Abdullah Gul in order to resolve the Kurdish Question (Goker, 2016). Seven years after this meeting with Erdogan, the Mothers indicate that nothing has changed. Even though he had said that their issue was also the issue of his cabinet (Personal Communication, 23/04/2022; Three Minutes, 2018). Similarly, the Saturday Mothers also met with the Committee of Wise People, a committee which was also created with the goal of working around the resolution process of the Kurdish Question. (Goker, 2016). While it is positive these meetings took place, they have not accomplished anything as the Saturday Mothers' demands of acknowledgment and accountability for the disappearances have still not been accomplished (Goker, 2016).

On the international level the Saturday Mothers have also made their mark. On the 168th week of the protests, the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo came from Argentina to sit with the Saturday Mothers for the first time (Ivegen, 2004). As the Abuelas are the Saturday Mothers' inspiration this visit was strong mental support, and proof that they had been heard across the world (Personal Communication, 23/04/2022). According to Sebla, they have visited 6 more times since then. When there is such an international visit or international attention, the police violence is also considerably lower (Istanbul, 23/04/2022). In December 1996 they received the Carl Von Ossietzky human rights award by the international Human rights league. They were invited to the Voix du femme festival in Brussels to work on enforced disappearances followed by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Some of the mothers then also participated in national and international conferences in order to reveal what they and their families have gone through and make the hidden violence visible. They also actively try to force the Turkish state into signing international agreements such as the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance in order to protect the people now. As of this year, 2022, they have not yet succeeded in this objective (Karaman, 2018). This all lead to important international attention. The matter quickly became a

highlight in the Turkish Human Rights record that the Turkish state was then forced to explain everywhere why they had not signed it (Goker, 2011). International attention has come in many different forms. A movie has been made about them as there were Saturday protests in Paris, London and Sidney in support of the Mothers (Personal Communication, 23/04/2022). Even U2 has made a song concerning Enforced Disappearances and dedicated it to the Saturday Mothers on several occasions (U2, 2007).

(U2, 2007)

4.4. Analysis conclusion

The Saturday Mothers have gained celebrity status in Turkey since their start in 1995, despite the fact that many, particularly the ruling political circles, would rather prefer they had not. Even though they almost never speak, it is their simple, yet emotional cries that resonate in the hearts of many. (Umut, 1997). By the time the protests ended a first time in 1999, they had already achieved clear and concrete results. The number of disappearances declined from 121 in 1995 to 68 in 1996 and even 9 in 1998. The efforts of the Saturday Mothers proved to be a breaking point. Thanks to them, new enforced disappearances had become harder to execute out of fear for the public reaction (Orhan, 2008). As Sebla told me, the use of enforced disappearances has even come to a complete stop since 2011 (Personal communication, 23/03/2022). The mothers achieved in making their loved one's human again, instead of just statistics by using pictures and telling their stories. Their personality and history got known, not just their ill fate. They rescued them from being a statistical number. As shown above the Saturday Mothers changed over time. If they were not political actors before, over the years of struggle they soon began to question the power relations, and their position in society (Orhan, 2008). In this manner they became political actors. However, they never gave up their identities of mothers, they did however, add a strong political aspect to it (Ivegen, 2004). Because of the Saturday Mothers movement, an entire section of society became politicized

and spoke out on public issues. Issues they before had even been unaware of (Ivegen, 2004). In this aspect the consequences of this movement are extremely significant. This “new” mother identity that they had created kept the traditional elements of devotion and self-sacrifice, but also became a public and political figure (Orhan, 2008). It is in the emergence of this political identity that see the evolution into political motherhood.

5. Conclusion

In the theoretical framework we have seen that the main difference between maternal activism and political motherhood is that maternal activism is primarily based on the children, while political motherhood focuses on the identity of motherhood. Meaning that in the case of maternal activism, while there can be political demands, they are made by the mothers but in favor of the children. The basis here is the presence of an activist group trying to realize and materialize a specific goal. As we have seen, maternal activism is often linked to enforced disappearances when the mothers come to demand what has happened to their children. This also leads to the emergence of a collective motherhood identity, where the individual case is expanded to all who were victim of the state violence. In political motherhood on the other hand, there are two options. Either it is top-down political motherhood, where the dominant political power utilizes an ideal image of motherhood that can be used to enforce its own position and firmly locate mothers in the domestical sphere. Or it concerns bottom-up political motherhood where mothers use their own identity as mothers and its attributes in order to gain access in the political field. When demanding this access, they will however also demand better opportunities for their children as the motherhood role is obviously very important. We can see the overlap in these two concepts in the importance of the role of motherhood and that the demands are made for their children. The evolution from maternal activism into political motherhood is thus placed in how far the goals have a political nature for the mother themselves. When the mothers start claiming a permanent place in the public sphere in order to demand political change we can speak of political motherhood.

In the analysis we have seen that the Saturday Mothers clearly started out as a group of maternal activism. Following the enforced disappearance of their children they took to the streets to demand information of where they were and for the state to take accountability. However, they did not see themselves as political actors. They acted on behalf of their children. By starting the protests, working with human rights organizations and talking to others their political view and understanding expanded both quickly and exponentially. During my interviews it became clear that they now

effectively see themselves as political actors and human rights activists who want to achieve change on a larger political level. While their original goals of demanding information and accountability still remain, they have expanded to a demand of justice and a democratic reform in Turkey. This shows that by going through the struggle of the protests they became aware of the political reality and subsequently wanted more change. This transformed them into political actors and thus proves the evolution from maternal activism to political motherhood.

More research on these subjects is still possible and much needed. The role of motherhood and what it entails, how it is experienced in different contexts around the world and both top-down and bottom-up political motherhood can and should be researched in many more cases. Further research is also possible on the feminist controversy concerning these concepts. Both on the feminist side, but also on why groups as the Saturday Mothers are so defensive when it comes to being labeled as feminists. Lastly there is both a possibility and a need for more attention to the Saturday Mothers and what they have achieved. Their influence on the Turkish society, how they managed to stay active for over 40 years and how it became an organization that overarched up to three generations so far should be further studied and analyzed. But also, how they handled the disappearance of their children, the uncertainty whether they were dead or alive, what they had to go through and how they had to mourn without a body or the possibility of a grave deserves more academic and societal attention.

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7. Annex

7.1. Interview Questions with the Saturday Mothers

I'll start with quickly introducing myself. My name is Eva De Clippel, I'm 26 years old, and I am a masters student in political sciences at Ghent University in Belgium. For my master's thesis I am working around the theme of mother's political activism. Within this I'm looking at the Saturday Mothers of Turkey, how they have evolved and what they have accomplished.

Thank you very much for taking the time and effort to answer my questions. I have the deepest respect for you, for what you are doing and for what you have accomplished so far. If there is anything I can do for you, please do let me know. If there is any information you do not want me to use, like stories or your name, this is of course no problem!

1. What is your name?
2. Do you want to stay anonymous in this research?
3. How old are you?
4. What is your profession?
5. Do you prefer the name Saturday Mothers or Saturday People? And why?
6. How did you get involved/ became a member of the mothers?
7. For how long have you been a member?
8. Are you from Istanbul?
    a. No: Did you move here for the mothers?

9. Do you have family members who are a part of the mothers? If so, what are their own motivations for becoming part of the movement?

10. What do your family and friends think of your involvement in the mothers? Do they know about it?

11. Do stay in contact with others member?
    a. Yes: how?
    b. No: How do you get information about meetings?

12. How do you know what the future plans are? Trough meetings, text messages?

13. Do you think the physical sit-ins will restart or remain mostly online?
    a. Yes: will you join again?

14. What is the meaning of the red flower?

15. How do you feel about the digitalization of the protests?

16. Aside from the sit-ins/ publications on Saturdays, what else happens?

17. How important is the title of mother to you in these protests? Do you feel it has an important emotional value?

18. Is being a part of the Saturday mother a big part of your life now?

19. Do you feel like you have more power now than before joining the mothers? Like you have the power to change something?

20. Do you feel like you have political influence now? Or do you try to stay out of the political?

21. Where you involved in politics before joining the mothers?

22. Would you say you’re a human rights activist?

23. What do you see as the biggest accomplishment the mothers have had so far?

24. Have you had interactions, good or bad, with the state?
    a. Yes: What, Where ,When and Why?

25. How are you dealing with the trials? Both personal and as an organization?

26. Is there anything that would make you want to stop?

27. Are there any experiences you want to share, things that stand out to you?

7.2. Interview Questions for Human Rights Organizations

1. What is your name?

2. Do you wish to remain anonymous in the end product of this research?

3. What organization do you work for and what do they do?

4. How long have you worked here?

5. Have you worked with the mothers before? (How, When, Why, What)

6. Have you seen some kind of evolution in the movement, things that have changed? Such as?

7. Do you see them as human rights activists and why?

8. Have you ever joined a protest?
    a. No: Why?
    b. Yes: How did it go, what where your impressions?

9. What is the meaning of the red flower?

10. How important do you think the title of “mothers” is and why?

11. Do you think because of these protests they have a bigger political role? And in what way?

12. What kind of influence do you think they have had so far?

13. What has changed because of them?

14. What do you see as the biggest accomplishment the mothers have had so far?

15. Do you think the physical protests will restart?

16. What kind of interactions have there been between the mothers and the state? (state = Government and police)

17. How are they dealing with the trials? Is your organization involved in any way?

18. Do you think the trails will happen in a fair and just way?

19. Aside from the sit-ins/ publications on Saturdays, what else happens?

20. Are their any experiences you want to share, things that stand out to you?