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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

This book draws on my PhD dissertation, which aims to explore the formation identity of "Kurdish women" as political actors during the emergence of Kurdish women in public sphere since the 1980s. I had enough reason for choosing this topic. First of all, the Kurdish question was standing at the top of the political agenda since 1984. Women, on the other hand, played a central role in the public image of the Kurdish opposition which had been in effect during this time. For that matter, as a person and particularly as a woman living in Turkey, analyzing the issue from women's perspective had become an appealing task for me.

One can argue that the increased visibility of Kurdish women as political subjects in the public sphere during the 1980s and especially in 1990s is already a sufficient reason for choosing this subject. It is also known, however, that the political *sensitivity* of the subject brings round those who wish to study the topic.

Thus, if I did not have other concerns, I could have considered the political sensitivities and directed my attention to other subjects. I did not choose doing this because this study meant something more than an academic title for me. A focus on Kurdish women's history in 1980s and 1990s from a feminist perspective was also a journey into my past; it meant comprehension and examination of my own history as well.

Women were the most popular figures of the Kurdish movement: There was a discourse about them, in this discourse many things were said about them. Among all the things said, however, their voices were lacking. The attempt of tracing the voice of women was a meaningful act by itself. I had to face the challenge to transgress the boundaries drawn by the "Kurdish women" identity and in order to do that it was necessary for me to comprehend the history, components and the dynamics of that identity. I was looking for the voices of Kurdish women but also aimed at reaching these objectives. In this sense, one can say that the book in your hands is composed of two different but interlinked stories of a journey: a personal and social narrative.

The distinguishing feature of the Kurdish political movement of the post 1980s is that it succeeded the mobilization of women. Another characteristic of the movement is the transformation witnessed in its form and demands. Even though it had the radical claim of separation at the outset, the Kurdish political activism came to articulate its demands within the framework of citizenship and human rights discourse based on ethnic/cultural identity in

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<sup>1</sup> "Translation of this chapter from Turkish to English is made with the contributions of Human Rights Joint Platform (İHOP)

these years. The increased emphasis on ethnic identity, one can say, is not a peculiarity of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. Rather, we have witnessed the emergence of new social and political movements, organized around the demands of rights on the basis of individual and collective identities, in different parts of the world in the late twentieth century.

Both Turkey's *Kurdish Question* and the corresponding Kurdish opposition(s) have a history that stretches back before the foundation of the Turkish Republic. The changing circumstance, i.e. the socio-economic transformation of Turkey and the globalization processes, however, contributed to the alteration of the form of the opposition and made it possible to talk about its "novel" features such as the increased emphasis on collective cultural identity. As a matter of fact, it has been noted that in different parts of the world, globalization contributed to the revival of ethnic or religious identities, those excluded from the homogenizing identity-formation-processes of nation states. These identities were considered to be neutralized with the capitalist development and modernization processes (Touraine, 1997). As opposed to these, collective identity, cultural and symbolic forms constitute important components of the ethnic identity politics, which have emerged and articulated its human rights claims, demands for recognition and representation within the parameters of new social movements. Women's higher participation to such movements is noted to be an important aspect of these forms of political organization.

In fact, women's involvement in ethnic/nationalist movements is not a new phenomenon. Even if Virginia Woolf declares that women are bound neither with nations nor with nationalist arguments by putting the words in the mouth of her female pacifist character "My country is the whole world"<sup>2</sup> women actively participated in anti-colonial struggles of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, they have played important role in political activisms with ethnic/national bases and continue to do so today as well (West, 1997).

Similarly, many women have become active and publicly visible within Kurdish movement in post 1980 period. As "Kurdish women" they took part in street demonstrations and meetings, joined political parties and even were taken into custody or arrested at times. Their involvement was approached and evaluated differently by different strands: Kurdish political circles were conceiving and presenting the phenomenon as the indicator of "Women's emancipation". In printed or visual materials women were depicted as the carriers of "Kurdish culture" with their colorful and bright dresses; as the symbols of "grievance and demand for right" with their images in front of prison houses and as the "symbols of freedom"

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<sup>2</sup> "As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" Three Guineas (1938)

with military dresses. There was an absolute silence in academic circles, on the other hand. This silence was strange since a significant number of studies were carried out on Islamist women, who came fore with their protests on the ban on headscarves in the same period (Göle, 2004; İlyasoğlu, 2000). There was no such interest in Kurdish women. This ignorance might be explained with the factor of political sensitivities mentioned above. The silence was not limited with academia, however; a similar lack of attention was also present within women's movement. Their aloofness, then again, probably derived from the assessment that the Kurdish women were putting forth political agendas of the Kurdish opposition and failed to address the woman question in their activism. Within this context, Kurdish women were evaluated as the instruments of a male-defined nationalist discourse. It was against this background, my concern became to understand the experiences, perceptions and explanations of Kurdish women of the whole process.

As a person, who has observed at close range and participated the dynamism of Kurdish women's activism throughout the 1990s, my personal experiences and observations lead me to the following notable point: both of the approaches that I have been criticizing so far, that is, the approaches of "victim" and "emancipated" women reduce Kurdish women to a homogeneous category. Therefore, both approaches are not able to fully understand and explain the complicated structure/characteristics of this dynamics as well as its causes and potential consequences. Furthermore these views fail to hear women's voices or give tongue to their demands, concerns and experiences. In Spivak's (1998) terms, women's voices *cannot be heard* in these evaluations.<sup>3</sup>

I have tried to reach out for and heed that voice in my research. My initial hypothesis was that women cannot be conceptualized merely as instruments or victims in any social process. For this reason, in my research design I aimed at finding answers to the following questions: How was it possible for women who are deprived of formal means of political participation such as education, economic resources and time to overstep the boundaries of their homes and of traditional gender roles, participate in public sphere and become political actors? Why did they participate in Kurdish political activism in the first place? What were the internal and external factors which facilitated their involvement in such activities? Was it due to the loosening of the monitoring mechanisms, which imprison women within private sphere for a long time? Did women's activism denote transformation within control

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<sup>3</sup> Spivak uses the term *subaltern*, which she borrowed from Gramsci, to denote the non-elite and subordinate groups. By stating that the subaltern cannot speak she argues that they are rendered invisible and voiceless by the privileged groups. (Spivak, 1988; Landry and Maclean, 1996; Guha and Spivak, 1988)

mechanisms? If so why such transformation was needed and how was it realized? How do we assess the novelty in the monitoring mechanisms? For instance, what change do we observe in value systems that were built around the notion of *namus*<sup>4</sup> and target women as the subject of control when they leave the private sphere and stepped into the public domain? What was the link between women's identity and Kurdish identity, the formation of which was considered the core of the political movement? What were the components of the identity of Kurdish women? What was the social, political background of Kurdish women's identity and which personal experiences contributed to that construct? Which symbols have been used in the formation of Kurdish women's identity? Who drew the boundaries of that identity? What kind of obligations did it impose on women? What did Kurdish identity offer women? What did it mean to be a "Kurdish woman"? How did women assume their identity and undertake the obligations it brought? Why did they undertake the task of being/acting as Kurdish women? What did the process of identity formation and identity acquisition mean in terms of women's empowerment? Could it possibly have a transformative impact on existing gender relations?

Addressing these questions required the development of a theoretical framework which pays attention to social movements, ethnic identity and gender relations, analyze the operation of these processes, their interaction and aggregated impact on social and political lives of women. For this purpose I have relied on the new social movements approach and on works engaged in the study of ethnicity and/or nationalism from the perspective of gender relations. Following section will provide a short summary of these approaches.

### **The Construction) of Ethnic or Nationalist ideologies and Practices:**

Both the nationalist movements and ethnic ideologies appeal to myths of a common history, culture, symbols and language in the creation of a particular collective identity. Important works of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century have challenged and even transformed our conception of nationalism (Anderson, 1993; Hobsbawm, 1992; Gellner, 1998). Concepts like "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm, 1992), "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1993) contend that ethnicity is not a fixed or essential condition and that the nation does not correspond to a fixed primordial identity; nations are constructed by nationalism. While these theorists demonstrate the role of intellectuals and bureaucrats in the formation of national identity, they are critiqued

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<sup>4</sup> *Namus* is a concept denoting chastity, virginity, sexual honor and also moral qualities women considered to have in Turkey contexts. (Translator's note)

by the feminist scholars for not taking women into their account of nationalism.<sup>5</sup> Some (Yuval-Davis, 2003: 21-23) argue that it is necessary to theorize the intersection of the discourses of gender and nation and their mutual construction of each other. Inserting gender and gender relations as an analytical category into the analyses on ethnic/national identity formation processes is not a call for making women visible in theoretical works. These demands derive from the assessment that gender is one of the constituting components of ethnic/national identity and has a central role in political projects of identity formation. Studies that analyze ethnic/national identities with a gender perspective call attention to the fact that men speak and act on behalf of the community and that women do have symbolic roles. For Cynthia Enloe (2003:79) nationalism “has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculine hope”. According to Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989) women have a particular role in the ideological reproduction of national and ethnic collectivities. They are,

- the biological reproducers of the members of ethnic collectivity,
- carriers of cultural traditions in the ideological reproduction of the community,
- signifiers of nationality, central symbolic figures used in the signification, formation and ideological reproduction of boundaries between ethnic/national groups,
- disseminators of cultural boundaries between ethnic/national groups, markers of identity
- participants in economic, military, political, and national struggles.

Having benefited from these analyses in the understanding of the interaction between Kurdish ethnic identity and Kurdish women’s identity formation, I nevertheless think an emphasis on cultural and symbolic processes carry the risk of pacifying and victimizing women. Such an approach might leave out their subjectivity and their volitional acts. Chatterjee’s (2002) study, which traces the formation of national identity through anticolonial to postcolonial Indian nationalism, argues that the dominance of men’s voice does not necessarily mean that the others’ are missing. Indian women actively participated to the

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<sup>5</sup> There are different arguments explaining why theories of nationalism fail to take gender into account in their analyses. Carole Pateman (1988) gives one of the most notable accounts of this failure in her “the sexual contract”. By looking at the social contract theories from a gender perspective Pateman contends that the social contract, which constitutes the basis of the citizenship law, is a “fraternal pact made between the brothers”. The equality of the public domain is founded by a second contract made between women and men and through the separation and opposition of the public and private spheres. Based on the construction of female and male, women are confined to the private/domestic sphere, whereas men rule the public/political domain. The concepts and the institutions of the public sphere are masculine terms. Since women are excluded from the political arena throughout the history, their absence in studies on “nations”, “states” is not surprising. For Nagel (2000:61) women are rendered invisible by being the recipients of the attached roles. She also points out the masculine aspect of the politics of nationalism.

nation building process of India, even though the process has engendered their subjection to a new form of patriarchy.

One cannot ignore the fact that the existing power relations contribute to the subordination of women in society. Nevertheless, one should also assess neither the power relations nor the identity definitions are fixed. As Hall (Hall in Stephen, 2005: 66) notes, identities are social constructions. They change and shift in response to various factors. Gaining insight into multiple factors and dynamics through the processes of identity formation enables one to foresee that both identities and the power relations may be transformed. In this sense, I deem Foucault's (2000: 75, 235-236) relational conception of power to be important for my analysis.<sup>6</sup> Thereby, we can foresee that women, as political subjects, can possibly resist and even transform the processes which define their identity, status and roles.

The Janus-faced quality of ethnic/national identity formation projects in terms of their impacts on women, I have recognized throughout the research and foresee that these would make transformations more likely. The contradiction in question lies in the twofold discourse employed by nationalist movements. While the discourse of women's rights and modernization invites them to the political struggle with the promise of transforming traditional identities, the discourse of collective identity attaches women symbolic meaning and aspires subjecting them to the new forms of patriarchal control mechanisms. Conceptualizing "Kurdish women" as "mothers", as the bearers of the authentic essence of "Kurdishness" and formulating their gender roles within private domain in accordance with such conception does have different implications than envisioning them as "politicians" or "warriors". While both discourses have been effective within the movement<sup>7</sup>, changing the terms of the discourses is dependent upon women's struggles. Their resistance might

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<sup>6</sup> For Foucault, a power relationship requires a certain degree autonomy of the ruled: "a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that the 'other' the one over whom power is exerted be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up... Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free... power always generates resistance, there are no relations of power without resistance" (2000:73,75,236).

<sup>7</sup> The circulation of multiple and conflicting symbols at the same time is not a particular feature of Kurdish nationalism. In Palestine, for instance, *Leila Khaled*, the *Palestinian* hijacker was becoming popular as a "women warrior fighting for her nations" and turning into a symbol of the Palestinian resistance in the 1970s, women in refugee camps were encouraged to give birth to more children. While the image of "militant women" was promoted, women were asked to play the role of the bearers of the Palestinian population and culture (Berger-Gluck, 1997:106).

determine whether Kurdish women's gender role would be limited with the traditional association with the private domain or defined as active participants in social life.<sup>8</sup>

The theoretical-intellectual framework, which I have tried to outline, has paved the way for my search for the traces, conditions and requirements of such resistance. In examining the formation of Kurdish identity together with women's personal identity building, and their becoming of political actors I have benefited from new social movements approach<sup>9</sup>. I have used concepts like *collective identity*, *collective action*, *actor*, *daily life experiences* and *social networks* of the theories of new social movement. A gender based approach was necessary to conceive the women's identity within the web of gendered power relations and discourses of Kurdish nationalism. The gender approach has necessitated a search for women's adaptation and empowerment strategies. Kandiyoti's (1997) concept of "*patriarchal bargain*", in this sense, becomes beneficial. The concept of empowerment is also an effective tool in understanding women's construction of their identity, their reactions to existing forms of gender and identity relations?) and mechanisms of resistance.

### **Collective Identity, Collective Action and the Actor**

The concept and theory of identity is usually criticized for being prone to essentialism. Judith Butler (1992), for instance, challenges the terms "women", "men" and "gender" by claiming that they have essentialist connotations. Bearing Butler's critique in mind, I think, it is still possible to use the term collective identity without falling into the trap of essentialism. For Stephen (2005) we can think of identities in their deconstructed forms as Stuart Hall has suggested. Hall proposes to conceptualize identity formation as a never-ending process. For him, we should focus on these processes of identity formation, which are relational for they operate across differences; via the recognition, construction of the other (2005; 66).

Conceiving collective identity as a social formation/construction process has some benefits. As Melucci (1995: 52-57) also notes, such a conception directs our attention from top to the bottom; enables us to listen not only the discourses of leaders but unheard voices, not the peaks of visible mobilization but the hidden, small-scale dimensions of collective movements. The concept of "collective movement" is employed in this research for it enables

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<sup>8</sup> I do not intend to argue that motherhood denotes a passive and a traditional role whereas militancy automatically equates with an active and modern role. As a matter of fact, there have been examples which construct motherhood as a political subjectivity. I do want to emphasize that by being honored as mothers, women's role have been limited and pacified with that status.

<sup>9</sup> For some examples of the New Social movement Approach, See: Della Porta and Diani, 1994; 1999; Mc Adam, 1994; Mc Adam et al. ,1996; McCarthy, 1994; Tarrow,1996; Tarrow, 1999; Roche,1995; Maheu, 1995; Melucci, 1994; Melucci, 1995a; Melucci, 1995b; Nush, 1995a; Nush, 1995b; Touraine, 1997; Larana et al. 1994; Larana et al. 1996; Klandermans, 1994; Pakulsky, 1995; Eder, 1995; Wieviorka, 1995.

to reveal the processes at work throughout the ‘becoming’ of Kurdish women as political actors within the Kurdish movement. The emphasis on the relational and constructed aspects of identity enables one to conceive the possibility of transformation. If collective identity denotes an ongoing relation, the transformation of the subjects, defined or set in motion by that identity, then, can transform the overall identity.

From this perspective, it becomes possible and meaningful to ask whether the participation of women in the Kurdish movement has had an impact on the on the definition of the Kurdish identity by and within the movement. Thence, as it will be presented in the following sections, I have questioned the shift in the Kurdish discourse from portraying women as “damaging” in the 1980s to women as “to be trusted”, “heroine” and as “the founder of the new society” in the 1990s. By conceptualizing collective action and collective and personal identity as constructions formulated within processes of interaction, I contend that it is not only the Kurdish identity, which has been shaped but also women’s personal identities that evolve in time. I evaluate women’s social and political activity/subjectivity within Kurdish movement as *praxis*, denoting the dynamic relation between action and consciousness.

It is important to address the impact of political action/praxis on women’s transformation from ordinary persons to political actors. Nevertheless, this assessment does not provide and explanation for women’s political participation in the movement in the first place. Scholars of new social movement theories offer to a look at people’s daily life experiences and social networks, for an answer to this question. For some (Zald, 1996), collective action is organized around shared frames of meaning, which is fuelled by increased feelings of injustice and grievances. Even though ideologies operate via collective action frames, it has been stated that they derive from the sufferings and injustices people experience in their daily lives. A feeling of grievance when shared within family and social networks (family, relatives or neighbors) might lead to the formation of a collective identity and set off a collective action. In short, the processes that give birth to collective actions and actors are experienced at the intersection of private and public domains.

Consequently, Kurdish women’s increased visibility in public protests, demonstrations and political acts, in fact has been a mere appearance; the observed part of the “Kurdish women” identity. Behind this appearance there are the experiences of migration, violence, poverty, human rights violations, individual and collective grievances, shared within social networks. It is through the process of sharing, a collective identity came to being. In this way,

one can understand the formation of the identity of Kurdish women and their collective activism despite lacking the formal means of political participation.

I have found the concept of “empowerment” particularly useful in understanding the phenomena of participation in collective action and the processes of identity formation. Empowerment is defined as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives (Page and Czuba, 1999:2-3). For Braumühl (in Wedel, 2001:23) women’s empowerment is realized at various levels and it engenders the development of numerous personal and social skills such as self respect, emotional maturity, independence, increased awareness, higher access to means of personal and social development. While interrogating the impact of the course process of collective action on women’s empowerment, I have considered these dimensions of empowerment together that is how their access to means of development has changes, has their awareness increased or have they gained more self confidence etc.

### **A Method for Hearing of the Unheard Voices: Oral History**

The argument that women’s voices have been neglected or gone unheard specified the research method at the onset. It seemed almost impossible for me to reach the knowledge I was looking for by employing traditional positivist research methods and techniques of social sciences. Feminist scholars challenge/criticize traditional social science research since they argue knowledge of women's lives have been absented in these studies. Or they are constructed from the perspective of men (of dominant class and race). The feminist research suggests research should proceed from a perspective that values women’s experiences for social analyses (Harding, 1996; Mies, 1996; Çakır, 1996b; Çakır ve Akgökçe, 1996). Upon deciding to listen to this advice I have tried to analyze the roots of Kurdish women’s social/political activism and the results of such activism from their perspective and based on their experiences. I have relied on the method of oral history and personal narratives with the hope that I can give voice to women, their witnesses, daily life experiences, ideas and needs, and enter their world of meaning.

I conducted interviews with forty women between February and May 2005. The duration of the interviews was two-hours at average but they varied between one-hour and a half-day at times. In the selection of interviewees the snowball sampling technique was used. I generally arranged pre-select interviews and tried to contact women with various backgrounds and characteristics. Women with different social and political experiences, working status and of differing ages and classes are tried to be included within the research

group. In order to attain the desired level of variety I have applied women's organizations and different branches of municipalities in Diyarbakir.

I have preferred to carry the research in Diyarbakir because I think the events which took place between 1980 and 2000 around the issue of Kurdish question impacted the city most and extensively. Diyarbakir was the city, affected most from the mass migration in those years.

By being aware of the implications of interviewer-status in terms of the emergence of a possible power relation of the "researcher as subject" and the "research object", I provided clear and correct information on the subject and the methodology of the research to the respondents before the interviews. Albeit following a specific guideline, I tried not to interrupt respondents' speeches. By being an insider, having cultural affinity with women I interviewed and particularly speaking the same language I was able to establish a non-hierarchical relationship. The benefits of the shared culture, however, were lost in the face of socio-economic differences. It was easier for me to build a relationship with women who live in the city center, who have an occupation, and/or work within a party, association or civil society organization than with women who live in squatter houses in the outer skirts of the city. With the former group I was sharing the same socio-economic status. While I was interviewing women in public laundries, in public relations of the offices where they had been waiting in queues for job possibilities or social aids, my outfit, occupation and my interviewer position created a distance.

Albeit feeling empathy and putting effort for the development of a trust- relation, I did not want the interviews to become conversations platforms where women pour out their grievances. Nevertheless, I have to admit that it was difficult for me to keep that under control and not to feel the emotional burden some times, particularly when I listen to the stories of the loss of the loved ones (relatives, siblings or partners), narratives of forced migrations or of experienced violence.

I have to note that the face-to-face interviews were instructive and somehow shaking for me. I have achieved increased awareness on the needs, ideas and world of meaning of women, whom I had met in other contexts as an educator, representative of the party etc. In contrast to that form of relationship, in these interviews where a lateral relation was established, listening from within became an enriching but also stirring experience.

From the design stage of the project until to the completion of the research, I aimed to serve the purpose of women's studies and women's empowerment; I stood with women and partly was identified with women.

I put women's narratives at the center of my research but I also benefited from other resources to explain the interaction between the processes of Kurdish and women's identity formation. It was also necessary to go beyond the subjective experiences of women and situate them in particular contexts under the impact of external factors such as the socio-economic and cultural conditions, the ideology of the Kurdish movement, mobilization strategies and prevailing discourses on women's identity. Thence, the speeches and statements delivered by leaders, periodicals, party programs and regulations and other organizational documents were also included in the research. In order to develop a profile of active women participants, I have conducted a survey, which consists of open- and closed-ended questions. The survey was done on 122 women working at the head office or within the local party organizations of in People's Democracy Party (HADEP) in 2002. The questionnaire and aggregated results can be found in the annex at the end of the book.

The first chapter of the book provides a description of the existing gender relations and of Kurdish women's status considering the importance of the gender relations in the formation of ethnic/national identities.

The second chapter discusses the ideological discourse of Kurdish movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in terms of its gender construction.

The third chapter evaluates the post-1980 Kurdish movement with regard to women's mobilization. In order to understand the impact of women's participation on the discourse of the Kurdish movement, primary texts of the movement are analyzed in a chronological order.

The fourth chapter probes women's experiences in politics, i.e. their participation to political parties, which become important domains where women act as political actors. The transformations observed both in the institutional structure and the discourses of political parties are evaluated within the context of women's participation. I have analyzed party programs and regulations, the organizational structure of the parties and the formation and the development process of women's organization. By looking at intra-party correspondences and meetings with party leaders and with women who had an active role within parties, I also tried to trace the mentality shifts and explicate possible tensions within the movement.

The fifth chapter analyzes the constitution and the constituents of the identity of Kurdish women. This part of the book attempts to discuss the processes of the formation of collective identity, collective action and the development of personal identity in terms of their interaction and from the perspective of women.

## Excerpt from the CHAPTER THREE

### 3. 3. Gendered Construction of the New Identity

#### 3. 3. 1. Ancientness and Re-Creation: “Revival Completed, Time for Liberation”

The political mobilisation process had an impact on the development of political identity among Kurds at the beginning of 1990s. The newly defined Kurdish identity was in line with the arguments of the social movements literature: the identity was defined via collective action and the interaction of agents. The identity took its shape within the political mobilization process and in terms of the changing profiles of the agents. It is worth emphasizing that the leaders of the Kurdish movement label the process with the slogan “Revival Completed, Time for Liberation” (Kurkcu and Duran: 1995) and attributed this peculiarity of the Kurdish identity. The term “Revival/ resurgence” denotes a classical implication concerning the political processes of identity formation on the basis of ethnicity/nationality. Ancientness (antiquity) of the ethnic collectivity/identity is implied with this term. It refers to a mythological golden age, to an essence that has been preserved until present times. An implicit connotation of this term is that this essence has been obscured or made unrecognizable in time. Therefore, resurrection requires the revival of that essence its reconstruction in line with the envisagement of ancientness, and within the framework of political project and its mechanisms. This is the way emancipation would be realized.

The slogan, “Revival/resurgence/resurrection Completed”, implies that although Kurdishness has preserved its “essence” until today, it was subjugated and *degraded/(disgraced)* [düşürülmüş]<sup>10</sup> by “external enemies”/“colonialists” and by their “feodal collaborators, compradors”. Kurds have been doomed to mediaeval institutions and relations. Therefore the task to be done is the reconstruction of Kurdishness in terms of modern institutions and modern relations while regaining the freedom.

Their addressing of questions like at which social space, with which symbols, by which agents and through what kinds of processes, the identity construction will be implemented, are important for our discussion. First of all, the family became the social space by which the “old” and “*degraded*” Kurdishness has been analyzed. The status of women within family, in this sense received a major focus. Thence, family has become the space where the construction of the new identity would be completed. It has been assumed that the new Kurdish personality/identity will emerge within the collective action process, which will transform the family, the woman and man. Again, it has been also presumed that this newly

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<sup>10</sup> Degraded for “Düşürülmüş” may not be enough. Although “degraded” has many meanings some of which correspond with the implications of “Düşürülmüş”, the word “düşürülmüş” also includes weakening of somebody’s willpower.(Translator’s note)

constructed identity would replace the old family, old man and woman with the “new family”, “new woman” and “new man”. As Scott et al., (1994: 169) assert, the collective identity has a normative aspect. It operates as a constitutive force and demands conformity from the agents: the outlined identities of “new man” and “new woman” denote new duties and responsibilities to be assumed by women and men. As long as women and men conform to the the new identity’s given responsibilities they are allowed to be the creators and identifiers of the modern character of Kurdish identity. The responsibilities implied by the idea of new women and new men however are defined in terms of the strategies of the movement.

Although the new identity discourse has a claim of having a homogeneous and modernizing character, it is fragmented and eclectic in its nature. Due to this fact, expressions with contradictory meanings may coexist within the discourse and of the identity. One of the striking examples of this case is that on the one hand the modernization discourse attributes a “mission of women’s emancipation” to the Kurdish movement but on the other hand it includes the basic patterns of the approach to women of a social platform negated by itself as “comprador” and “feudal” social order. The figures of “siren woman”, “intriguer woman” frequently seen in the early texts of the Kurdish movement, in this sense, do not differ much from the images of the “coquette, evil woman” of religious ideology<sup>11</sup>. This deceiving woman figure has persisted and been underlined within the movement discourse as one of the most negative image, confining women to the private domain.

### **3. 3. 2 Gender Matrix of the New Identity: New Family, New Manhood and New Womanhood versus Old Family, Old Manhood and Old Womanhood**

Since the public sphere is a domain of equality and sameness, the private sphere is assumed to be the symbolic site where Kurdishness as a new and “different” identity is constructed. In fact, the new identity has been constructed also through the family metaphor like all other similar national/ethnic identities.

The process of identity construction is realized on new versus the old dichotomy: the old family is replaced by the new family, the old-slave woman is replaced by the new woman; the old- pseudo man is replaced by the new (and implicitly the real) man, femininity and masculinity are replaced by characteristics of the goddesses and the virtue of “killing masculinity”. Let us take a deeper look at each of these points. In the introductory section of

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<sup>11</sup> For an article on the origins of negative image of woman in religious ideology See: Mernissi (2003)

this chapter, a review of the ideological framework of the Kurdish movement and its critique of the old- forms (family, women and men) developed within the framework of movement's objectives and strategies was provided. This critique suggests that the "old" family prevents individuals from becoming political subjects, hence is a "comprador" institution. The offered model of the "new family" which is going to replace the old one is the "nation family"; nation by being larger and more comprehensive is the new family superseding the old family. As I have stated previously, the family metaphor has an important role in the construction of ethnic/national identities in many contexts. The homeland is likened with home and nation is depicted as a family enabling people to imagine the community as a unity with links rooted in the long past. This metaphor is functional to the extent that it leads people to think that the nation is natural like the family, that the members of the nation are linked with organic/natural ties.

From the perspective of nationalist imagination, the (old) manhood becomes the major obstacle to the construction of the new and larger family. A discourse critiquing heavily the oppression of women and children by men, men's domination over women and violence against women has come to the fore in this process. This critique argues that men take revenge for all forms of societal oppression they face, for being unemployed and subjugated by displaying exaggerated acts of machismo within private domain against women. The channelization of the feeling of revenge from public to the private domain, in fact, prevents men from resisting and transforming the macro-system. The destruction of the "sense of masculinity is a must in that sense.

"Rather than being a leader in revolutionary political-social relations, the short-sighted perspective promotes the status of the head of household, prevents the development of a socio-politic leadership personality. The absence of the feeling of leadership in our culture is rectly linked with this fact. Thence, the destruction of the sense of masculinity is a must." (Erdem, 1992: 76)

It is important not to fail to notice the implication of the term "old- pseudo male"; the adjective "pseudo" implies that there is a real/authentic male character. The ideological criticism of pseudo-masculinity and of the male despotism within family may have a democratizing impact on family relations at societal level. This implication of authenticity, nevertheless, seems to be strengthening the status of "real" male within the hierarchy of gender relations. In contrast to the man, the "old woman" in the identity matrix does not include a prefix of "pseudo", rather it is depicted as a "slave" or "disgraced" woman.

### **3. 3. 5 Nonsexual Goddesses: The Characteristics and the Prerequisites of Women's New Identity**

Since definition denotes a power relation, the newly constructed identity for women erects boundaries, separating the insiders from the ones excluded and it establishes rules to be followed by the ones included. The edge of the border between the inside and outside is mainly drawn with the duties and responsibilities of women. Thereupon, as a constituent subject, women can not be an ordinary woman. According to this discourse, the constituent woman, who is defined as "reliable" is someone who has already passed over the threshold of her ordinary "weakness" and has become a part of the Kurdish movement. Those women failed to cross the threshold are perceived as ordinary women, the successful ones are admired:

"When I say women should be trusted, I refer to those women, who own their identity, acquire their personality and who have the possession of themselves... Those who revive, who teach how to live with their power of thinking, power of organization and administration with their valuable approaches... This is the free women I recognize and do not move back from. Some thinks that these types of women are dangerous; I, however, admire these women" (Ocalan, 1999: 85-86).

While new woman identity has been depicted with these terms, it is difficult to find a correspondence of this definition in daily social life. Moreover, the discourse itself makes this impossible. Before anything else, it is underlined that emergence of the new woman from within the present old family is impossible. The critique of family does not include political suggestions to democratize the family in daily life instead it has a symbolic meaning that is serving to call the women and men in the criticized family to participate in "new family". The character of "new woman" just like the "real man" cannot be reached in the course of the daily life but represents a destination that may be attained *via* participating in the "party family" and by struggling for the creation of the new/large family. The condition of being the "new woman" is defined as a status that can be gained only within the collective action.

It is useful to take a deeper look at two women-identities; one denotes a negative meaning and identity in contrast to the second construction with positive implications. The negated "old-slave woman" image was affirmed with the attribution of negativity to her sexuality. Her slavery was built around her sexuality. The issue of the sexuality of the "new women" has become a problematic issue then. What would happen to the sexuality of "new

woman”? Would the “new” conception abolish the negativity surrounding women’s bodies and their sexualities?

As it has been indicated in the introductory chapter, the “new woman”, which is the symbol of the new society, is depicted as a sexless construction similar to many nationalist identity formation processes. The “new woman” in the Kurdish case is a nonsexual character as well. As it will be discussed in later sections, with expressions like “goddess”, “transforming into a goddess” the Kurdish movement’s discourse puts an emphasis not only on the negation of sexuality but also on sacrificing the self; the goddess should be both asexual and selfless. In this context, “new woman” identity is constructed as a destination to be reached through heavy sacrifices. The tasks which are expected to be fulfilled by women and men for the leaving of old identities behind are not same or just. While participating in the political movement is sufficient requirement for men, women are expected to prove themselves to be goddesses. For women gaining such a status while she is alive, however, seems impossible.

## **Excerpt from the CHAPTER FIVE**

### **5. 5. 1 Women’s Political Mobilization: A Step into a Terrain beyond the Hierarchy of Gendered Roles and Domains**

One of the most describing features of the Kurdish movement of the post-1980s is that it has succeeded in the political mobilization of Kurdish women in massive numbers. These women stepped into public sphere as the relatives of prisoners or of the missing persons or as “peace mothers” rendering their “motherhood” identity a public character and a political content. They attained visibility in public demonstrations sometimes as signifiers of an authentic Kurdish identity, as the representatives of demands of the Kurdish identity, as “modern women politicians” as it was exemplified in the case of Leyla Zana and sometimes as “guerilla women” in military uniforms.

This was a phenomenon unseen within the Kurdish political tradition before. Even though the expansion of capitalist production relations led to dissolution of the traditional social structure, the patriarchal mechanisms controlling women had been sustained in the Kurdish society for long time. Under these conditions, how was it be possible for women to leave their homes, to go into the street protests, public demonstrations, even to the “mountains”, i.e. political spheres which traditionally were men’s sites of activity? The oral history interviews have shown that the consciousness towards Kurdish identity and participation in collective action on the basis of that identity have become possible through

the family relations, relatives and neighborhood networks. Networks of informal relations have been effective in the development of a collective identity and on women's participation in collective action.

Women's engagement in political activism had its roots in the military coup of 12 September 1980 and in the human rights violations their family members faced, the violence experienced in everyday life after the military intervention. During this period of time, the image of the "grieved mother" played an important role in making the human rights violations publicly known.<sup>12</sup>

When the number of political murders by unidentified assailants and of missing persons reached unprecedented levels in 1990s, again women were involved in public demonstrations with their "mother" identity. In these years, every Saturday they gathered in front of the Galatasaray High School in Istanbul and made themselves known as "*Saturday mothers*" or under the title of "*mothers of missing people*". The image of "mother" was invoked again in late 1990s and became functional in the formation of "*peace mothers*". These women transformed their motherhood into a political identity, they became politicized and acted as political actors since other members of their family, especially their children were taken into custody, arrested; the children of some went to the mountains to join rebels, some were killed.<sup>13</sup> Thence, based on this example one can argue that a traditional gender role, which is associated with the private domain as it is in the case of motherhood, the same role might acquire a political content and transform its meaning and also practice. This is important for showing that by becoming political subjects mothers/women somehow redefined the private and public spheres and initiated a process which gets through the borders between private and public spheres (Berger-Gluck: 1997).

Women did not only become visible by public demonstrations and through the extension of their mother-identity into the public sphere. They were also engaged in activities, organized activities which articulated further political demands on Kurdish identity in the early 1990s. They joined the ranks of Kurdish supported political parties, became active and effective in these parties. Some of those women even participated in the military struggle. Furthermore, there were educated and professional Kurdish women who were interested in politics and participated in the political activities even before 1980.

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<sup>12</sup> Narratives of women who wanted to communicate with their relatives but since they did not know how to speak Turkish, the difficulties they experienced due to the ban on speaking Kurdish in prisons were so dramatic they could have become subjects of sad stories.

<sup>13</sup> With regard to that mother identity gained a political content in Latin American countries in 1970s see, Jennifer G. Schirmer (1989)

In order to gain further insights into this process one needs to take a closer look at those women's life stories. The emotional burden of the imprisonments of family members and relatives, the psychological impact of witnessing the departure of the loved ones for joining rebels in the mountains or of hearing their death in armed conflicts turned into strong motives for women from different age groups, education levels and social status to do some things.

For most of the women who participated in different forms of political activism in 1990s, have narrated their interest in politics with references to the leftist youth movements which were effective at societal level before the military coup of 1980 and with particular remembrance of the sorrows caused by the September 12th. A commonly shared feature of these narratives, in this sense, is that the leading actors of these stories were not the women themselves. They were their most loved/ favorite brothers, the elder brothers who moved to the big cities for education, husbands or known young men, all of whom had been remembered with their well-manners and decent personalities. The sympathy felt for the leftist youth movement came to be identified with the love felt to these family members. Their experience of the military coup of 1980 was denoting the traumatic events these relatives and family member underwent, custodies, imprisonments, tortures etc. "Injustice", has appeared to be the major theme brought to the forefront in 12 September memoirs. The youth movement, on the other hand, was recalled with the concepts of "rights" and "equality" by the majority of the participants. The quotations below exemplify this case,

" (...) my husband (...) used to bring Kurdish audiotapes to our home. He was always bringing books, written by Lenin, for instance (...). We knew some things about leftism, who leftists are. *We were leftists, the leftists have always been the oppressed ones. The beaten, the oppressed ones are always leftists.*" (Italics are mine) (Hikmet)

"Back in those times there was the right-left separation in Diyarbakır. *The leftists were the ones backing up the poor. For the rich people, it is always about them... their interest always come first. For the leftists, however, "people "should come first (...).* One of my brothers was a member of the *Dev Sol*<sup>14</sup>. They were called as communist in those days. That brother of mine was always reading... He was bringing those books to me to hide them in my place." (Italics are mine) (Makbule)

These two examples show the importance of the informal networks i.e. family ties, relations with relatives on women's political awareness and affinities. These women somehow commingled the loving memory of their family members and their sympathy for the

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<sup>14</sup> A leftist organization

left, acquired the latter's emphasis on "justice" and formulated it as an important component of the framework within which they conceive the *Kurdish Question*.

As stated earlier, women's traditional gender roles would not allow their participation in political activities. The door, however, was slightly opened with the imprisonment of their brothers and relatives after the military coup of 12 September. The sufferings of that era have been directly linked with their political activism in their statements:

"Some of my cousins were arrested after the 1980 military coup. Those arrests affected me, that's for sure. The violence of the era was known and told by everyone. Every night, we woke up hearing shouts. We participated in hunger strikes for our relatives who were in prisons. Following my uncle's son martyrdom, such feelings grew more. He was a beloved person in the family. (...) It was during a hunger strike for the prisoners in 1988 (...) We thought that [we] should support it." (Gülsüm)

"(...) There had been a big raid. Our family had never been oppressed by the state until that day. (...) My elder brother stayed in custody for 41 days (...) then he was arrested. We were visiting him every week in the prison. It was during those times we suffered from oppression. (...) Speaking Kurdish was banned...later they released my brother but we never ceased our our relation (with the prisoners) (...) I always took part in hunger strikes." (Saadet)

The discourse of grievance continues to be effective in women's participations to political activism in 1990s, when the Kurdish movement initiated its strategy on women's mass mobilization. As a matter of fact when telling about their participation in mass protests or hunger strikes women utter the impact of their relatives or of the neighborhood relations during the interviews. Some narrations reveal that women who had participated in such activities did not have a political consciousness at the outset but such engagements encouraged them for further and later political activisms. Fikriye's story was not different in that sense. Fikriye was a woman who rarely left her home until her brother was murdered by unidentified assailants and her sister's children went to the mountains one after another and they lost their lives. While she was participating in the funerals of her relatives she started to grow interest in politics; eventually, one day she was taken into custody together with her daughter:

"Actually I did not have clue on politics or whatsoever; there was no such a thing in our house as well. Only some of the relatives on my father's side did have such interest. However, after those funerals I did not even care about the kids. I was leaving them behind and going to my sister's (...). My brother became a political martyr. (...). He was such a good brother. (...) He was killed (...) They said it is because of the Kurdish issue. I did not know what it was but I was not against

it either (...) You know, I was loving them [relatives who were in rebels] cause they were my family. When my elder sister's daughter was in prison, I was going to her visit (...) They asked me why I was going to see my nephew. I replied that she was my elder sister's daughter. Why shouldn't I go?"

There were also other examples indicating the importance of relative and neighbourhood relations and encouraging role of the events that the family members experienced on women's increased political activism. Women were justifying their participation in political protests with reference to the undeserved maltreatment their relatives or neighbors were subjected. For them, their involvement in collective action was a necessary, rightful and natural thing to do, indicating their loyalty to the family members:

"Whenever I heard that a martyr was brought to the district, I went to the funeral (...) The thing happened to your neighbor may also happen to you too." (Muazzez)

"My sister was arrested in 1994. (...) I never lived my own life after that. (...) I was emotionally involved. It was for my siblings. (...) I had a political inclination [towards the Kurdish movement] before but if someone so close to your skin is within the movement, then you want to be in it together as well, so that some things may happen more quickly. In fact, this is what draws you into the movement. You think that I should do something as well so that we may come to the end of it as soon as possible." (Zelal)

The grievance women feel in the face of the experiences of their family members was the primary motivation for their participation in the movement; it also increased the extent and intensity of the impact of ideological propaganda of the movement. While women in city centers left their homes already under the conditions mentioned above, women living in the villages which were 'visited' by the "rebels" found themselves right in the middle of the events. Nure's story was a typical example of this situation:

"We were not aware of things like Turkishness in those times. The son of one of our villagers went to the mountain. We were saying "he joined the terrorists" (...) In fact, I was very curious. (...) Later one, they came to our village and I saw them. One night, there was a wedding in our village. During the wedding they made an announcement, they said guerillas are here and they are going to have a meeting...there next to the mosque. All of us went to the meeting. And they came. There were two women and two men. They were armed. (...) I sympathized with them that night. Then they started to come on a regular basis. (...) On one day, there was a march in our village and I joined too. A military conflict emerged. 36 people were injured, 5 died. I was not scared at all. On that day, a few of us, women saved many people."

## **5.2 The Impact of Expectations such as Identity Seeking, Freeing from Social Constraints and the Need to be “Esteemed” on Young Women’s Participation**

While the participation of middle-aged women was limited with political parties, human rights organizations, supporting networks or the organizations established by relatives of prisoners, there were young women who went to the mountain to join the rebels. For these women, going to the mountain meant, firstly, to take part in “an armed rebellion against the system”. Secondly, enabled “being away from the family and the society they live in” and therefore came to represent an “rescue”. Oral history interviews indicate that the second meaning was more meaningful for them and had more impact on their participation than the first one. The answers they gave to the question why they had gone to the mountain were differing from women to women with regard to their family structure, environment and living conditions. Ayşe who stopped pursuing her university education in Istanbul in order to join the rebels explained her reasons to be ideological and as a result of her seek for identity in Istanbul:

“I did not have a political affiliation until I went to Istanbul. I was acquainted with it in my university years. I could not somehow adapt to the environment in Istanbul. (...) You do not have a sense of belonging to there. (...) Then you start to discover your identity there. (...) It was those times when I participated in [Kurdish movement].”

Ayşe’s reasons and motives were different from the reasons of Gülsüm, Hasiye and Sevgi. Gülsüm was living in a traditional family structure in a small town; Hasiye was born into a village where women are subject to serious labor exploitation and patriarchal surveillance. Sevgi, on the other hand, was complaining about her mother’s continuous control over her. For these women, participation in the movement meant setting free from family pressure, from their predefined paths (i.e. getting married, having children etc.). It also meant recognition and respect. These justifications remind us Melucci’s (1994) emphasis on the importance of “whys and wherefores” in the participation in social movements. In fact, even though the movement’s mobilization process, its ideological arguments and discourse have had an appeal to women facilitating their participation as external factors, women’s own attribution of meanings to the women have become more decisive in their participation:

“My cousin was participating in political activities. (...) This was praised in society, they were proud of her. (...) I admired her. (...) People were also showing respect. Those who were in prison were talking about an “women army”. They also told that by going to the mountain women could join this army. The idea got my attention, if you know what I mean.(...) I have learnt feminism in

this way. (...) I never considered getting married because I had observed my sisters' marriages.”  
(Gülsüm)

“My mother had preferred being dead than hearing something like gossip about me. This is why she almost cut me off from the outside world. I wanted to be out. Joining guerilla, in this sense, was a release. They do not value individuals, especially woman in our society or within families; women are not cared at all. That's why... This was the most important thing I was thinking about back then. I was assuming that they would certainly be surprised and say “Wow. It was a bolt from blue, how she could do that.” A woman who went to the mountain was perceived differently then. It was the year 1997 and I went to the mountain.” (Suna)

“The friend who came with me had a wedding in the week we went. She did not want to marry. It was the end of the year 1991. So we joined. (...) Marriage was something like... I don't know...No matter what I just did not want to marry.” (Hasiye)

Based on women's narrations, we can see that going to the mountain has a direct link with their every day life and they attribute meaning to the participation in movement based on their real life experiences. If we set Ayşe's story apart, the two most important reasons of women's involvement in the movement are the will to escape the limited family environment and the will “to be respected”.

### **5.3.1. The Grievance Frame of Collective Action, Identity as a Seeking for Right-Justice**

During the interviews, I asked women their ideas on Kurdish question and their suggestions for the resolution of the issue. All of the responses strikingly are formulated within the frame of “rights/injustice”. As I mentioned before women's initial interest and experience in politics dated back to the military coup of September 12, 1980. Their narratives and ideas on “Kurdish Question” followed the same historical line. Their stories began with the September 12<sup>th</sup> and with the ban on Kurdish and turned into a discourse on human rights, identity rights and social justice in the course of events. Such a perception and expression can be traced in almost every story women were telling; it did not matter whether they had political experience or not. Women with political experiences, on the other hand, paid a particular attention to these notions. Women articulate their interpretation of the discourse of the grievance and of rights of the Kurdish movement on the basis of unjust treatments and right violations they had faced in their own lives. The ideological framework, in this way, has been materialized with grieves and sufferings of the real life.

When addressing the question on reasons of Kurdish question, women mentioned political factors but underlined the socio-economic factors. I found it remarkable that women used the concept of “oppression/cruelty” not only for political repression but also for denoting (the effects of) unemployment and poverty. Some examples of these assessments are presented below (emphases are mine):

“I mean *rights*. I perceive the Kurdish question as an issue of rights. [On solution] For me, it means the acquisition of the rights.” (Selma)

“...It’s our *natural equity*. For instance, we were being *insulted*, we were *being oppressed*. They were despising us. You know, our relatives in villages are still suffering from oppression.” (Mükrimé)

“They killed my brother. They killed my father. My brother-in-law’s children were *imprisoned* several times. My brother-in-law stayed in *prison* for 7 years. (...). They said “Kurds *are right*. Kurds are being oppressed. *We were tortured*”. Well, “the villages were burnt”, and now there are no villages (...) If you ask me, then I would say that [the rebels] *are right*. (...) They *were oppressed*, we all were oppressed, and I can’t say that we were not.” (Suzan)

“We are human beings as well, we do have rights. As human beings we seem to exist but we do not exist. Is that right? Why is that so? This is the issue, *oppression*. Well, then this is a cause against oppression. I mean poverty. It is the problem of the Southeast [region], of the East [region]. All of these problems, may be they were all because of the poverty.” (Gülizar)

“They demanded rights. The state, on the other hand, was not giving their rights. This is the reason. (...) We were *oppressed* and *insulted*. (...) If the state had established a *factory* here; if our husbands had worked there, if they had earned income, then our husbands wouldn’t have felt embarrassed towards us.” (Medine)

Another salient aspect of these narrations is that the Kurdish issue is mainly associated with political oppression and poverty, and that it is perceived as a problem caused by originating from the state policies. This approach reveals itself in women’s discourses when they discuss the political and socio-economic aspects of the issue. They do not construct “Turks” or any other community/collectivity as opposed to the identity of “Kurds” or “us”. The “other”, which is constructed in opposition to the Kurdish identity, which constitutes the borders of

“us”, appears to be the political system. This result suggests that women do not perceive Kurdishness within the framework of essentialist, cultural or biological arguments; rather they embrace it as an existential struggle and a process of demand for rights on the basis of their social and political experiences.

**Excerpt from the CONCLUSION:**

When I began this study on women’s participation in Kurdish political activism and on the formation of Kurdish women’s identity in post-1980s, my primary assumption was that women should not be conceived as the objects or mere victims of social processes. This proposition necessitated addressing some questions; the first one of those, for instance, is how women managed to participate in such activities. Considering the prevailing norms, which relegated women to the private sphere and usually disapproved women’s engagement in political activities by leaving their homes, understanding women’s ways of involvement became important. The second but more fundamental question was why they did participate. Finding an answer to this question was particularly important considering the argument called up by research on nationalism and gender. Accordingly, ethnic/nationalist ideologies and projects reinforce women’s secondary status and place them under a new patriarchal control.

Kandiyoti (1997) suggests understanding of women’s inclusion in social processes, which give them secondary roles, within the context of patriarchal bargain. Although one can argue that such an approach is relevant for Kurdish women, my research asserts that other factors should be also considered. I am particularly referring to the effects of the political movement and women’s active involvement. Oral history interviews reveal that women’s participation as political agents have produced results that differ both from Kurdish movement’s ideological discourse or the requirements of the political project.

My research asserts that the “Kurdish women” identity has not been imposed on women. Even though this identity draws boundaries to be kept, establishes rules to be obeyed it is thru this identity women have stepped into the public sphere, gained recognition and have had the opportunity to move freely. The “Kurdish women” identity has opened a terrain of new social and political experiences for women, which further have enabled their empowerment. Women’s active and massive participation not only has shifted the gender conception within the movement but also inserted women’s demands into the political agenda of the movement.

Albeit including traditional metaphors such as ‘family’, the constructed “Kurdish identity” does not seem to reinforce traditional gender roles. New “Kurdishness” is equated

with the “new family”, which defines women as active and constitutive subject, as required by the movement’s ideology and mobilization strategies. This transformation has been enabled by the profiles of the agents; women’s involvement in women as political actors has influenced the definition of identity within the movement. Even though the family metaphor is indispensable to “Kurdishness” as it is to other forms of nationalisms and ethnic movements, the family discourse of this identity does not assign men to lead political roles or women to assume and transfer authentic features of the identity.

The affinity of Kurdish movement with the socialist ideology and its political strategy of mobilization of women lead to the construction of women’s identity in public sphere and in relation with social and political roles. The images of “activist”, “politician” or “warrior” women come to symbolize not only the novelty of “Kurdish identity” but also the modernity of the identity in particular and of the Kurdish movement in general.

Women’s entrance into the public sphere became possible with the dissolution of the patriarchal codes that confine them to their homes and control their behaviors. *Namus*, the key concept of such control of men over women’s bodies and actions was redefined. Nonetheless, the transformation that has enabled women’s participation in public life has not totally abolished the patriarchal control yet. The loosening of the patriarchal control is made possible by the process of desexualization. The presence of the “new women”, who is active and bearer of rights, on the other hand, is sustained on the condition of being “chaste” (virtuous). Those who violated these codes of behavior have been expelled by losing the privileges the new identity provided.

Despite the borders and limitations, women assume the identity of “Kurdish women”. This is so because this identity gives them the opportunity to leave their houses without much trouble and to find new social channels. Their agency, on the other hand, contributes to the transformation process of both the Kurdish and women’s identity. Collective action denotes a process through which women reconstruct themselves as subjects with rights and even redefine the identity of “woman”. Based on their historical experience, they associate Kurdishness with notions “grievance”, “rights” and “inequality”. A similar perception and association has seemed to be emerging with regard to being a “woman”, suggesting that with the development of a collective meaning frame, women’s identity might constitute a shared ground on which further demands for transformation of gender, social and political demands would be formulated and acted upon. All of these, point out the fact that albeit being constructions, identities are realities that are built and lived within actions.