VOICES FROM THE PERIPHERY OF THE PERIPHERY:

KURDISH WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN TURKEY

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After the Kurdish woman politician *Leyla Zana,* had been elected as the deputy from the province of Diyarbakir in the General Elections in 1991, she wanted to give her first talk in the National Assembly/Parliament in Kurdish, yet her attempt met with a huge uproar. Afterwards, her deputyship was ended and she was sent to jail for 10 years. In this same period, the proportion of women in the National Parliament was around 4%. The dismissal of a woman, who succeeded in getting elected in such a country, on account of her speech in her mother tongue, at first sight seemed against Turkey's official policies regarding the increase of women's political representation. Indeed, the issue of gender equality has been a part of official policies of the Turkish Republic since its establishment. The founding elites of the Republic have viewed the visibility of women as equal citizens in the public sphere as both the symbol and goal of modern nation-state building and Turkish national identity. However, the goal of gender equality has not been realized from the foundation of the Republic in 1923 down to the present. The public sphere preserves its male/masculine characteristic and patriarchal ideology and structures have still been influential in preventing women's visibility in the public sphere.[1] The "invisibility" in the public domain is a more multi-dimensional

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[1] See Valentine Moghadam (1994) for the characteristics of the "patriarchal belt", in which Turkey is also found. See also Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) for patriarchy in Turkey.

problem from the point of view of Kurdish women, because the only obstacle that Kurdish women face in becoming more visible in the public domain is not only patriarchal obstacles but also official politics of identity. The official non-recognition of Kurdish identity, as can be seen in the case of Zana, prevents their self-(re)presentation outside of official identity codes in the public domain. That is why it is rather difficult to investigate and analyze the processes that make Kurdish women visible outside of official identity codes in the public realm.

This article is about the mode(s) of approaches to Kurdish women in social sciences and other nation-wide/national intellectual discourses and texts in Turkey. In the first part, through a discussion of the constraints of conducting research on Kurds in Turkey, I argue that Kurds/Kurdish women are *invisible*. In the second part, based on a qualitative case study entitled "Women in Kurdish Movement and the Constitution of Kurdish Women's Identity from a Feminist Perspective", I attempt to design a methodology that would make Kurdish women *visible* as political agents.

Kurds view themselves as one of Mesopotamian peoples, whose history dates back to very early ages.[2] Although they have differences in regards to the countries they live, their denominations and their dialects, they are generally accepted as a separate people (Jwaideh, 1961; Minorski et al., 1996; Nikitin, B., 1986; McDowall, D., 1997, Kirisci, K and Winrow, G., 1997). The lands where Kurds have historically lived are today found within the boundaries of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Amongst these four countries, the largest Kurdish population lives in Turkey. According to an estimate, approximately 10 % of the population in Turkey is of Kurdish origins.[3]. Although it is often indicated that in Turkey the largest

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[2] For a historical narrative arguing that Kurds are one of the settled peoples of Mesopotamia and for the founding myths of Kurdishness, see Bender (1995).

[3] The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) does not provide data in terms of ethnic origins and language used since 1965. Therefore, it is difficult to give a precise number concerning the number of Kurds in Turkey. The

ethnic group after the Turks is Kurds[4], the question of who is Kurdish is not an easy one to find an answer for. The only reason behind the difficulty of definition is not that, like all collective identities, ethnic identity is a result of a process of social construction, open to interaction and changing in time.[5] There are also more specific problems emanating from official politics of identity in Turkey: until the 1990s, at an official level, Kurds have not been recognized as a distinct ethnic category in Turkey and the expressions and acts that can be characterized as a manifestation of Kurdish identity have been punished.

Part I

Making Kurds *Invisible* and the *East* as a Metaphor

The process of centralization, modernization and the construction of nation-state based on Turkish ethnic element, all of which started with the late Ottoman Empire and continued in the Republican Turkey, has been perceived as a threat to their existence by the Kurds who have had a semi-autonomous political life in the Empire. Partly as a result of the influence of Turkish nationalism, there emerged Kurdish revolts.[6] On the other hand, the rulers who have seen the existence of the Kurds as a threat before the realization of the creation a homogeneous nation carried out policies of denial and assimilation (Kirisci and Winrow, 2002: 120). The Constitution of 1924, which laid out the characteristics of the Young Republic, ended the legal presence of the Kurds, like the other ethnic elements of the country. It was as a result of the subsequent legal, ideological and demographic regulations that the categorical denial of the Kurds became possible. It was asserted that Kurds were of Turkish

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data given above is based on an estimate made by Servet Mutlu (1996), according to the responses given as "Kurdish" to the question of mother tongue in the General Census in 1965.

[4] See Kirişçi ve Winrow, (1997:122)

[5] For an elaborate analysis of the constitution of collective identities as a process of social construction, see Hall, (1996); Eriksen (1993), Melucci (1995).

[6] The uprisings which began in the late 19th century and continued up until the beginning of the early 1940s, were simultaneously colored by tribal, religious and national characteristics, which was a result of social and political organization of the Kurds. For various studies on the fusion of the tribal, religious and ethnic-national characteristics of these rebellions, see the followings: van Bruinessen (1992); Olson (1989); Yegen (2003).

origins and that Kurdish was a distorted dialect that was composed of a mixture of Turkish, Arabic and Persian. Needless to say, the official denial has ended neither the Kurds nor the Kurdish question. Nevertheless, due to such a policy, it became possible to erase the ethnic dimension of the Kurdish question and therefore, the Kurdish question has been able to be defined as anachronistic/outdated, tribal and religious reactions to such positive goals of the Republic as modernization, westernization and secularism (Yegen, 2003: 141-142).

The concept of the *east* has a significant place in making the Kurds and the ethnic aspect of the Kurdish question invisible. The territories where the Kurds have historically been settled are in the East of Turkey. However, viewed from the point of view of the construction of Turkish national identity, the *East* has taken on meanings that are way beyond a geographical site. The construction of a Western and modern national identity; in the sense that Edward Said (1985) puts forward, has been realized thanks to the othering of the *East* with negative meanings. In this discourse of *east*, particularly the emphasis on tribe, land-chieftainship and religious structure has been foregrounded. This emphasis was not totally far from telling the reality. As a matter of fact, when the Republic was founded, tribes and religious orders had a significant position in Kurdish society. Viewed from the perspective of political and socio-economic structure of the period, there should not be something strange about this.[7] The really strange point, however, is why these structures that are so often criticized have not been eliminated throughout the Republican history. To illustrate, the highly unjust land distribution has not been corrected throughout the Republican history.[8] To the contrary, with the development of capitalism in rural areas and the transition to multi-party politics, big

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[7] Martin Van Bruinessen, in his work titled *Aga, Seyh, Devlet* (1992), from a historical perspective, demonstrates the conditions of the emergence and interaction of these structures in a comprehensive manner.

[8] The data concerning the distribution of lands shows that, with the passage of time, the unjust landownership in the region did not decrease; on the contrary, it increased. According to Koymen ve Ozturkcan's (1998:85) analysis based on agricultural censuses, in the Southeastern Anatolian Region, from 1950 up until 1991, the enterprises in the group of 500 + *dekar* (land measurement of a thousand square meters) have constantly increased the amounts of lands they owned.

landowners, leaders of tribes and religious orders have been integrated into the national system in a way in which their existing political and economic powers would be raised. As a result of clientalistic relations developed with these leading segments, the system of chieftainship and tribal ties have become stronger and the inegalitarian structure of the region has become deepened in a way that impoverished the landless peasants and small land-owners. The modernized system of chieftainship has become an important institution of alliance with political parties and governments. Consequently, the traditional structures that have been condemned by the Republican modernization project have been kept alive in articulation with modern institutions (McDowall, 1997). Today, too, in their organization and in elections, political parties try to make use of the powers of tribes and religious orders in the region and thus strengthen the latter's power.

Recently, under the moderate Islamist AKP government, on the other hand, one can see the efforts at spreading religious communities and Islamic identity amongst Kurds in order to prevent the development of ethnic consciousness (Cicek, 2008). This picture presents a serious paradox in regards to the Republican project of modernization and of the construction of a homogeneous national identity. The reason for this paradox is as follows: on the one hand, Kurdishness is seen as an obstacle before the creation of a homogeneous national identity by being othered through the concept of the *east*; on the other hand, such pre-modern structures as tribes and religious orders are being reproduced in order to impede the development of a political consciousness based on Kurdish identity.

The Science of the "*East*", the "*East*" of the Science

The policies of denial and assimilation, which have been adopted since the 1920s have continued down to the present. Particularly, after the military coup of September 12, 1980, the

attitudes towards the expression/manifestation of Kurdish identity in public became much harsher and the use of Kurdish was severely banned (Kirisci and Winrow, 2002: 118). Although the ban was partially lifted in 1991,[9] the obstacles before the expression of Kurdish identity have still continued. The violence and oppression of the military regime paved the way for radical, separatist groups to find support amongst the Kurds. In such a context, the illegal Marxist-Leninist *Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)* declared that it started a war against Kurdish chieftains and the Turkish armed forces in 1984.[10] Up until today, more than thirty thousand people have lost their lives in the conflict between the Turkish armed forces and the armed Kurdish movement. Approximately three thousand villages have been evacuated by "security" forces and millions of people have been displaced (Kurban et al., 2006a). Armed clashes are still going on and thus, people still lose their lives. The conflict has destructed the regional economy. According to some estimates, the military expenditures in this conflict reach billions of dollars. The financial sources reserved to the region from the national budget are essentially getting used for military expenditures.[11]

Due to the bans, it is already difficult to talk about Kurds and the Kurdish question; the continuing violence makes this even a more difficult task. Moreover, such a difficulty has unavoidably had a negative impact on the approach in social sciences to Kurds and the Kurdish question. Legal prohibitions and political sensitivities have prevented the academic interest in these matters to a significant extent. The official denial and prohibition of Kurdish

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[9] The then-prime minister Suleyman Demirel, in a public meeting indicated that he recognized the Kurdish reality.

[10] For more on the emergence and development of this organization, see Ismet, I. (1992): *The PKK: A Report on Separatist Violence in Turkey,* Turkish Daily News Publication.

[11] Undoubtedly, the entire cost of the conflict was not limited with these. Serpil Usur showed the trauma of the mothers of soldiers and Kurdish rebels. Nadire Mater did interviews with the soldiers who fought the PKK and the impact of the conflict on their lives after they finished their military service. There has been made a very interesting Turkish movie, which, in the context of the high-degree conflict in the 1990s, pays attention to a young man's life after he became disabled in the conflict and had to live with a wheelchair. Nadire Mater, *Mehmedin Kitabı: Guneydogu'da Savasmis Askerler Anlatiyor* (Metis: Istanbul, 1998); Serpil Sancar Usur, "Turkler/Kurtler, Anneler ve Siyaset: Savasta Cocuklarini Kaybetmis Turk ve Kurt Anneler Uzerine Bir Yorum." *Toplum ve Bilim* (Guz 2001), pp.22-41.

identity has narrowed down the legal margins of studying the Kurds.[12] On the other hand, it has been made impossible to access to reliable statistical data concerning the Kurds.

As a result of these obstacles, Kurds have been –with some exceptions- *invisible* in social sciences as well; and in social sciences, too, the discourse of "*east*", "*the eastern question*", "*regional backwardness*" has been used. "*The Eastern question*", as in the context of modernization theory,[13] has been perceived as a question which would be eliminated by the expansion of modernization and development into the Eastern regions where the Kurds lived; that is to say, it has essentially been perceived as a question of regional backwardness. In other words, the scholarly/academic studies on Kurds have been restricted with the *east* of Turkey in terms of imagery as much as in terms of geography.

Undoubtedly, the discourse of regional backwardness is not completely far from capturing the reality. For instance, the Eastern regions, as socio-economic indicators show, are the poorest and the most deprived regions of the country (Icduygu, A. et al. 1999; UNDP, 2005). This gap, especially as a result of the violence and the problems of forced displacement, has been deepened (Kurmus, O. et al. 2006; Sonmez, M. 2007; Kurban, D. et al. 2006). Nevertheless, the critical point in the discourse of "*regional backwardness*" is the fact that this socio-economic phenomenon is not dealt with in its complicated relationships with the ethnic structure of the region as well as the relevant political conditions, all of which foster and reinforce one another. Undoubtedly, the socio-economic dimension is extremely significant and is an essential part of the question at hand. Yet through a discourse of regional

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[12] The adventure of the Turkish academic, who has conducted sociological research on Kurdish society, namely Dr. Ismail Besikci, can give a good idea about this point. As a young research assistant in a Turkish university in the 1960s, he wrote his PhD dissertation about Kurdish tribes. However, later on, he first lost his job and then he was sent to jail. Subsequently, he continued his works concerning the Kurds and was in prison for 16 years, due to the accusation of "separatism".

[13] For more on modernization theory, see Black (1986).

backwardness, a sole focus on this dimension irrespective of its ethno-political aspect would imply that the "*backward*" socio-economic structure of the region is seen as a mere result of the belated modernization; and therefore, it would not be possible to go beyond encoding the question only as one of time.

"*Eastern Woman*": A Homogenous Category of *Victim*

The modernist perspective on which the concept of "East" is based has also influenced the perception of Kurdish women within the discourses of social sciences and of intelligentsia. Kurdish women, too, are *invisible* in social sciences and they have been reserved a place only within the conceptual categories of "*eastern women*" and/or "*rural women*". Such a conceptualization implies a category of women, which modernization has not *as yet* been able to reach; a category of women, which does not *as yet* benefit from the Republican reforms concerning women.

As mentioned above, since the foundation of the Republic in 1923, the reforms concerning the social and political status of women in Turkey occupied an important place amongst others. The improvement of the social status of women was considered a tool in the way to reach "the level of contemporary civilizations"; to westernize and in order to fulfill these goals, relatively radical regulations were put into effect (Cagatay and Soysal, 1995: 335). In 1924, primary education was made obligatory for girls in addition to boys; with the acceptance of the new Civil Code in 1926 women were granted the rights that they had not had earlier. After the acceptance of the new civil code, more regulations regarding the public sphere were introduced. In this sense, in 1930 women were granted the right to elect and get elected in municipality elections; in 1934, these rights were also expanded to general elections, i.e. election for membership of parliament (Arat, 1998; Abadan-Unat, 1991).

One can see that in the studies undertaken about women in Turkey up until the 1960s, the positive impacts of the afore-mentioned reforms on women's lives have been foregrounded. However, later on, critiques have been raised, which centered around the argument that these reforms, in reality, remained limited with urban, elite women and thus, they have not been expanded into the rural areas. From the 1980s onwards, on the other hand, feminist academics and activists severely criticized Kemalist reforms and the construction of national identity from gender perspective.[14] Despite this critical turn made on part of feminist academics and activists, however, it is not possible to observe a satisfactory problematization of differences among women in Turkey.

To illustrate, in the following comprehensive edited works on women in Turkey, one cannot see the existence of Kurdish women: *1980'ler Turkiye'sinde Kadin Bakis Acisindan Kadinlar* [From a Women's Perspective Women in Turkey in the 1980s] (1995)*, 20. Yuzyilin Sonunda Kadinlar ve Gelecek* [Women and the Future at the End of the 20th Century] (1998)*, 75 Yilda Kadinlar ve Erkekler* [Women and Men in 75 Years] (1998). In some of these studies, although the concept of "*Eastern women*" implies that Kurdish women cannot *yet* benefit from the fruits of modernization and the Republican reforms on women, there is not a preoccupation with the reason(s) underlying this picture, which has been maintained throughout the Republican history.

In this sense, one needs to touch upon Yakin Erturk's (1995) criticism raised against the understanding that the impacts of modernization will spread by following a linear line. Erturk (1995: 202-203) argues that it is not realistic to expect from modernization process to improve

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[14] For some of these critical assessments, see the followings: Durakbasa (1998); Berktay (1998); Arat (1998); IIyasoglu (1998).

the status of women on the grounds that the political and military instruments that the state utilize in the process of modernization are already intrinsically gendered. Hence, such a process ends up marginalizing women's status rather than improving it. When one considers the general tendency in social sciences, such an observation is quite important. On the other hand, Metin Yuksel (2006: 786) criticizes the fact that the consequences of the ban on the Kurdish language are not problematized in this analysis. Yuksel's critique is important, because official language policies have a noteworthy impact on the fact that Kurdish women cannot benefit from the fruits of modernization as well as the Republican reforms. Earlier it was noted that, from the point of view of socio-economic indicators, Kurdish population constitutes the poorer and more deprived social category compared to the Turkish population. Icduygu and his colleagues (1999) define this phenomenon with the concept of "insecure environment" and especially they highlight the ban on the language as one of the elements of non-material insecurity. The deprivation of material and non-material resources in the insecure environment, as can be seen below, is most valid in the case of women.[15] Men, even if they do not receive primary education, they learn Turkish when they do their military service, which is obligatory for every male citizen at the age of 20. As Ayse Gunduz Hosgor and Jeroen Smits demonstrate (2003), the ban on Kurdish is essentially a problem for women[16] and thus, it is unavoidable that such a situation would have consequences, which would deepen gender inequalities. By the use of the concept of *linguistic capital*, Bourdieu (1991) indicates that being unable to speak the dominant language in a country leads one to be deprived of many resources as well as the access to the opportunities provided. As a matter of fact, women that cannot speak Turkish are deprived of many opportunities such as education or employment in formal sectors. All of the employed women within this category either work

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[15] According to the report of the UNDP of 2001, eastern regions have the lowest rates in the entire country, in terms of Gender Development Index/GDI and Gender Empowerment Measure/GEM (UNDP Human Development Index 2005).

[16] According to the findings of this research, while the percentage of women who cannot speak Turkish in Turkey is % 4.1; the percentage of the non-Turkish speaking husbands of these women is 4 per thousand.

in agriculture or as un-salaried family worker. The access to the public sphere of the women who do not speak Turkish is limited, their age of marriage is lower compared to that of the others and they have more children. Their opportunity of social movement is restricted and they are deprived of the knowledge of the outside world. This situation makes them dependent upon the family members that speak Turkish and moreover, it makes them defenseless against patriarchal traditions. In this sense, they are strictly controlled by their families and thus, they are more subjected to traditional cultural values (Gunduz-Hosgor and Smits, 2003:850-852).

Gunduz-Hosgor and Smits' work (2002) about intermarriages between Turks and Kurds in Turkey also points to the relationship between Kurdish women's socio-economic position and the question of language. According to their findings, Kurdish women are poorer and more deprived compared both to Kurdish men and non-Kurdish women in terms of income, occupational status, educational level and so on (Gunduz-Hosgor and Smits, 2002: 430).

As these figures also show, patriarchal social structure and official identity politics reinforce one another when it comes to the marginalization of Kurdish women. Non-Turkish speaking women lack the opportunity to find out about their rights and also they are deprived of the knowledge of what to do when subjected to patriarchal oppression and violence. Alongside all of these factors, the ban on Kurdish limits their freedoms of thought, expression and organization, in addition to preventing the use of their rights to elect and get elected. Yet all these rights and freedoms are the significant sources of individual development and security.[17]

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[17] There have been some non-governmental organizations that have put forward some solutions based on their researches about the consequences of the lived violence and the displacement of the Kurds. In this sense, these NGOs note that the setting of violence and the instruments and policies that the government applies to, lead to deepen gender inequalities. Moreover, they indicate that forced migration and the resultant impoverishment lead to increase the violence and patriarchal control which women are subjected to (Goc-Der, 2001; Diyarbakir Kalkinma Merkezi, 2006).

The fundamental problem with the conceptualizations such as "*Eastern woman*", "*rural woman*" is that they disregard the factors mentioned above. This kind of conceptualizations fail to take into account the role of official identity and language policies in the marginalization of Kurdish women; therefore, the conditions within which Kurdish women happen to live are attributed to the "backwardness of the east", ignorance and sometimes to the "outdated culture of the east". Furthermore, the conceptualization of "eastern woman" results in the fact that differences amongst Kurdish women in terms of age, class, level of education are made invisible and thus reducing them to a homogeneous category of *victim*. One of the results of encoding Kurdish women as *victims* through the use of the concept of "eastern woman" is that Turkish women are encoded as *emancipated women*. One of the problems that such a generalization as "*ignorant/victim eastern women*"/*emancipated western* women leads to is the fact that discrimination or violence against women is identified only with the experience of eastern women; and thus, making invisible the patriarchal violence that urban, professional, middle-class (emancipated) Turkish women experience.[18]

In popular culture, one can very often come across cases such that *emancipated* women are given the mission of educating and saving the pitiful, ignorant *eastern* women. This is not restricted solely with everyday press or media. One can come across the type of "ignorant eastern woman" in literature as well. For instance, in Ayse Kulin's novel entitled *Bir Gun* [One Day] (2005), Zeliha represents such a category. Indeed Kulin originally wanted to have a long interview with Leyla Zana and to write her biography; however, she could not receive a positive response from Zana. Then, the author had an imaginary interview with Zana and wrote the novel mentioned above. The novel is based on a dialogue between two women. The result that emerges at the end of the novel is that Kurdish women need to be educated. Such a

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[18] Altinay ve Arat's comprehensive research undertaken in 2007 once more showed that the violence against women was seen in similar proportions in both the eastern and western parts of the country.

result has to do with the roles that the author puts on the heroines. *Nevra* (the author) is an urban, well-educated, and professional (thus, *emancipated*) woman. *Zeliha* (Zana), on the other hand, is an "ignorant" woman. One of the results of "ignorance" is being unable to speak for oneself. In the novel *Bir Gun*, too, actually it is not Zeliha/Zana who speaks; it is the author who speaks on their behalf. The representation of Zana as someone who cannot speak on her own part legitimates the author's speaking on the former's behalf. The position within which the heroines are put into not only legitimates speaking on behalf of the "other", but it also results in a relationship of power.

The Kurdish woman that is able to speak on her own part, that is, the type that one cannot see in *Bir Gun*, appears in Oya Baydar's novel titled *Kayıp Soz* [The Lost Word] (2007). Two of the significant characters in this novel are Kurdish women. One of these two women, namely, Jiyan is a powerful woman whose word is listened to in her society and who is an influential figure in political arena as well. It is possible to assess this character from point of view of the change in Kurdish women's image as *victim*. However, it is open to debate that Jiyan's power originates from her tribe. Undoubtedly, in real life situations there are women who acquire their power from their tribes. Indeed, the type of traditional Kurdish women leaders are basically the women who get their power from their tribes.[19] However, today the Kurdish women who are influential in political arena are not tribal women whom Jiyan represents. Today's politically influential Kurdish women correspond to the emergence of a new model of political leaders. Indeed, Leyla Zana has been one of the first examples of such women, who did not have a tribal support in their political activism. The model that Zana represents is very different from the one represented by Jiyan and today this new model is becoming more

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[19] For traditional Kurdish women leaders see van Bruinessen (2001).

common.[20]. It is quite surprising; therefore, that such a novel as Kayıp Söz, which is particularly concerned with everyday political matters, *fails to see* such an important detail.

The Concept(ualization) of "*Free Woman*" as Opposed to "*Victim*"

One can see an exact opposite of the approach of "*victim*" in the Kurdish nationalist literature. The Kurdish nationalist literature represents Kurdish women as highly respected figures in both family and society. Furthermore, the same literature reflects Kurdish women as having strong leadership characteristics and as free women. The argument that "Kurdish women are freer than the women of the neighboring peoples" (Caglayan, 2007: 63) occupied a central place in the ideological discourse of Kurdish intellectuals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Indeed, today one can still come across this argument.

The above-mentioned argument was related in the works of orientalist travelers, western diplomats or military staff/supervisors and it was based on the following observations: Kurdish women do not put on veil, they can talk to foreign men freely and they have freedom of movement. Such an argument was being used in that period in order to prove that Kurds were a "distinct" and "civilized" nation (Klein, 2001). In an article he wrote in 1933, Kamuran Bedirxan (2002: 236), one of the important figures of the early phase of Kurdish nationalism, points to the warrior and leadership characteristics of Kurdish women and notes that women's position in Kurdish society goes even "beyond freedom" in Kurdish society.

In the following years, Kurdish politicians and intellectuals enthusiastically voiced Bedirxan's arguments. For instance, Musa Anter (1990), very often touches upon the women leaders in history and he presents this phenomenon as an indicator of the value/respect that the Kurds

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[20] To illustrate, the life stories of some of the mayors, party leadership or women members of the Kurdish-supported DPT are similar to Leyla Zana's story.

attribute to women. The same approach gets repeated in Mehmet Bayrak's significant edition called *Gecmisten Gunumuze Kurt Kadini* [Kurdish Women from the Past to the Present] (2002). *Kara Fatma*[21] [Black Fatma] the most well-known figure in the context of "Kurdish women's leadership" occupies almost half of the entire edition. It is also possible to find a similar approach in the works of the Kurdish researcher Rohat Alakom. According to Alakom in the far distant past, Kurds were a *matriarchal* society and today one can come across the remnants of this social structure (1995: 19; 2005: 77). Moreover, women tribal leaders are also a source of pride for Alakom:

> "(…) the most charismatic Kurdish woman who visited Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, in the 19th century is doubtlessly Kara Fatma. In 1853, when the War of Crimea started she went to Istanbul with her 300 horsemen to the presence of the Sultan and wanted to show her solidarity with the Sultan (…) in those years not every/all woman could ride a horse and wander around the Uskudar Square like a man" (Alakom, 2005:77).

One can see that just like the concept of "*victim*", also in *Kara Fatma*, who represents Kurdish women in the imagery of Kurdish intellectuals, the perception is one of homogeneity. Rather than having a correspondence with the real life situations, it is quite clear that such an image is the reflection of political image and imagination of the intellectuals mentioned above. Indeed, the unveiling of women, their freedom of movement and the like are the fundamental characteristics of nomadic and semi-nomadic tribal communities, in which relations of production and reproduction are intersected and the work conditions do not permit a spatial division. The leadership of women, on the other hand, as both Martin van Bruinessen (2001) and Friedrick Barth (2001) demonstrate, is phenomenon limited with dominant classes.

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[21] *Kara Fatma* is the Kurdish tribal leader, who, in 1853, went to Istanbul with her 300 horsemen and declared her loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan and declared her willingness to fight for the Sultan.

With political motivations, to argue that such a phenomenon as the leadership of women, which is limited solely with the women of dominant classes in a particular social and historical setting, originates from the "essence" of Kurdish culture and thus, to generalize it to all women will serve nothing but hiding the patriarchal oppression of women behind the myth of freedom.

In the post-1980 Kurdish political discourse, on the other hand, the discourse on women shifted. Like before, still one can see that extreme importance is attached to women's status. However, Kurdish women are not seen as naturally free. According to this new ideological image, Kurds have been enslaved and Kurdish women are the slaves of slaves. The first thing that women are supposed to do in order to be saved from slavery is to fight against the slavery of Kurds. The women who do not participate in this war are *old/slave* women and no respect can they have (Erdem, 1992). The following words of the leader of the PKK: "*That [woman] who fights become free, that [woman] who is free becomes beautiful; that [woman] who is beautiful is loved*" (Ocalan: 1999) expressly shows what women's duty is in order to be free and be loved.

This discourse, which appears to be concerned with the requirements of the process of the political mobilization of the Kurdish movement, reduces such a universal phenomenon as gender inequality to political conditions. Hence, it subjects the emancipation from patrirchal oppression, domestic violence and so forth, to ethnic/national liberation and calls women to political participation. Yet such a position, means keeping silent about patriarchal control or gender inequalities. Indeed, although in the Kurdish movement such abstract discourses have been repeatedly voiced regarding "women's emancipation", such concrete issues as domestic violence came to agenda only after 1999, when the armed clashes temporarily stopped. The

archives of legal Kurdish parties show that the coming to agenda of questions such as domestic violence was possible only after women's activism in these parties and moreover, these records show that women showed a lot of efforts to achieve this (Caglayan, 2007: 126-138). Despite all these developments, the myth that "importance is attached to women in Kurdish culture" still continues to be influential and thus, it can lead to disregard the violence against women.

In this sense, the attitude taken against honor-killings is noteworthy. The phenomenon of women's murders by the male members of their families has frequently been on agenda in the 2000s. The increased sensitivity towards violence against women has also had its share in making this problem more visible.[22] The fact that women are exposed to violence and get killed is not only seen in the East but it is also seen in the modern western regions. Nevertheless, "honor" killings have been talked about more as a problem related to the "east". The nationalist media even showed honor killings as a part of the culture of the Kurds.[23] Partly as a consequence of this kind of nationalist approach, Kurdish politicians did not take a satisfactorily influential attitude against the honor-killings that took place in the mostly Kurdish-populated provinces such as Diyarbakir, Batman and Urfa. Instead of being taken as a fundamental problem, these killings were perceived by the Kurdish political parties and the NGOs in the region as a secondary issue related to the "woman question".[24] Since the

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[22] In terms of introducing sensitivity in the public opinion, one can also see the impact of the new Civil Code of 2001, which had more egalitarian regulations concerning the private sphere; and the Criminal Law of 2006, which introduced more effective measures against violence against women. Despite these increased measures, women's murders on account of honor continued. In some of these murders, so as to escape the punishment, the murderers tried to present these murders as suicide. Therefore, women's organizations became more involved and concerned about this issue. In 2006, in order to investigate and determine the measures to be taken, an "*Investigation Committee in the Parliament*" was founded.

[23] For instance, the editor of *Hurriyet* (a Turkish daily with a high circulation), namely Ertugrul Ozkok, (June 14, 2006) notes that honor-killings is a problem of the Kurds and that the true Kurdish question is this.

[24] Such an observation, however, should not be taken to mean that the above-mentioned parties and organizations never took a stance on this matter. Indeed, one can mention the followings as some examples: human rights organizations and bars in the region referred to violence against women and gender equality in their campaigns concerning human rights. Likewise, one should mention the fact that in the summer of 2006, the Kurdish-supported Democratic Society Party published a circular directed to its local branches. In this circular it was

problem reached such an extent that it required the creation of an *investigation committee in the parliament,* Kurdish intellectuals also had to turn their attention to this issue. Yet the explanations of Kurdish intellectuals about this subject not only showed the reaction to the honor-killings but they also reflected some other concerns. For instance, the following quotes reflect the author's reaction to women's murders in the name of honor alongside his anxiety/concern for the potential bad-reputation that this would bring about for the Kurds:

> "Because of the honor-killings coming one after another, the international press is harshly criticizing the Kurds [It is] accusing [the Kurds] of wildness and barbarism. Honor-killings and domestic violence bring Kurds into mind. Every issue of the bulletin of the Amnesty International gives place to the story of a poor Kurdish woman. What is written there is like a slap in, first, the faces of the Kurds and then that of everybody. It is not possible to claim that the comments and accusations made about the Kurds in the international media are unjust. This [problem] before everybody and everything else, is the problem of the Kurds." [25]

Part II

Going beyond the Representations of Victim and Liberated

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Kurdish movement which developed after 1984, when the PKK started the armed conflict, has been its success to mobilize women as a mass movement. Throughout the 1990's, a large number of women started to be visible as political activists in the public sphere. They held rallies in front of prisons; they participated in street marches which ended in murders and wounds. They attended the mass rallies of the

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stated that no kind of violence against women could be accepted. Nevertheless, these actions/declarations have remained secondary in the discourse of human rights, equality and freedom of these institutions.

[25] Aslan, Gunay (2006).

Kurdish-supported political parties such as HEP, DEP, HADEP and DEHAP. Moreover, they started to hold posts in the decision-making and leadership mechanisms of these parties. They have become mayors and deputies. A large number of women went to the mountains to join armed groups. By 1993, one third of the PKK rebels in the mountains were women (Ozcan, 1999: 160). Even the families that were conservative about not letting women getting outside traditional space and gender roles reserved for them, accepted the young women's going to the mountains and they did not make an "issue of honor" out of this. Leyla Zana became the symbol of Kurdish women's struggle and consequently, in Kurdish society women's participation in politics has been embraced as a fact.

Frankly put, this process, which led to ordinary women's turning into political agents,[26] has not received due attention in social sciences for a long time. Political participation/activism of Kurdish women has not followed the codes of the mainstream social sciences approach. First of all, these Kurdish women have been different from urban, professional, well-educated women profiles in Turkey. While the women, who have been actively engaged in politics in Turkey, have been educated[27], a great majority of Kurdish women who were actively engaged in politics in the 1990s had been deprived of education. Furthermore, they did not have financial resources, time and experience, all of which were needs required by political participation.[28] Alongside the tendency not to see the Kurdish identity and the political

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[26] Indeed, initially Leyla Zana was not even literate and she could not speak Turkish. When her husband was arrested by the military regime of the September 12, she was a housewife with two children. Her political life began when she went to visit her husband in prison. Afterwards, her political activism continued with her works in human rights organizations and the Kurdish press. Eventually, she became the deputy of the Kurdish-supported DEP in the 1991 elections from Diyarbakir.

[27] Ayse Gunes -Ayata (1995).

[28] My analysis of the profiles of the activists of the Kurdish-supported HADEP during my research, concur with this observation to an utmost extent. A great majority of the women members of the HADEP, above middle-ages, are graduates of primary school. The women who are at various levels of decision-making and leadership organs of the party, on the other hand, are relatively younger and their level of education did not agree with the profiles defined by Ayse Gunes-Ayata. While some (14.8%) of the women in this category just know how to read and write, a great majority of them were primary school graduates (49.2%). The monthly income of the households of the women is about the level of minimum wages (The households of 29.5% of these women have an income equal to or below the minimum wage, while the households of 28.7% of the women have an income

activism demonstrated by this identity; the politically engaged Kurdish women's profile, which does not follow the codes of modernization perspective, led to Kurdish women's political activism in the public sphere to be made invisible. Other than some exceptions, they were disregarded in social sciences for a long time. Even when they were visible, they were represented mostly as the victims of the process of nationalist politicization and as the ignorant women foregrounded by male politicians.[29]

On the other hand, the Kurdish side's presentation of the women, who participated in the process of political mobilization, as "emancipated" women is problematic. The reason underlying this problem is that the relationship constructed between political participation and emancipation is not a factual one; it is, rather, an ideological one. Furthermore, such an assertion has the function of rendering invisible the patriarchal oppression and control that could exist in the processes of women's political participation. Moreover, feminist studies that analyze political and ideological processes based upon nation/nationalism from the perspective of gender[30], require analyzing the argument of women's "emancipation" in ethnic/national processes with a critical eye. As these studies demonstrate, the processes of ethnic/national mobilization have a great deal of features, which deepen gender inequalities. The pathbreaking studies undertaken about nations and nationalism show that nation is an imaginative constructs[31]. Moreover, feminist researchers underline the fact that this construct is based on gender. Both because ethnicity/nation-based ideologies have a male characteristic and the society is intrinsically patriarchal, the process of political mobilization most possibly

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somewhere between the minimum wage and twice of the minimum wage). While the number of the rooms in the houses of these women members of the HADEP is generally one or two; the number of people living in their houses is somewhere between 5 and 8 people. The proportion of those who had a social security, including *Yeşil Kart* (*Green Card*, i.e. a social security service provided for the poor, who do not have any ties with any social security institution, whatsoever) does not even find 50% (Caglayan, 2007: 151-154).

[29] As an example of victim approach see Necla Acik, 2002.

[30] For some of these studies, see the following: Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989); Yuval-Davis (1997); Yuval-Davis (2002); Jayawardena (1994); Enloe (2000); Enloe (2003); Cockburn (2002).

[31] See Gellner, (1983); Smith (1986); Anderson (1991); Hobsbawm (1990).

would have consequences such as rendering women secondary in importance [compared to men] and reproducing traditional gender roles. Hence, in an analysis of Kurdish women's political participation the approach of the *emancipated* women has been as much insufficient and misleading as the approach of the *victim*. What is perhaps most striking at this point is the fact that in both approaches it has been someone else who speaks on behalf of Kurdish women and the voice of Kurdish women has been inaudible. As an "insider" of the Kurdish movement for many years, 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.

In my study called "*Feminist Perspektiften Kurt Hareketinde Kadinlar ve Kadin Kimliginin Olusumu*"[32] ["*From a Feminist Perspective Women in the Kurdish Movement and the Construction of Woman Identity*"] was that, while researching Kurdish women's participation in politics, I aimed to view this process from the "point of view of women" and to reach their own voices. As Kurdish women have been marginalized both due to their gender and ethnic identities, such a research project that would make them visible as political agents, would need to go beyond official identity politics. Moreover, such a research would also require a critical approach to the ideological discourse of the mobilization process of the Kurdish movement. As someone actively engaged in policies on women in the legal Kurdish parties

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[32] Completed in the year of 2006, this research is essentially based on oral history interviews with forty women who had varying degrees of ties with the Kurdish movement in Diyarbakir. In this research, I also analyzed the political and ideological texts of the Kurdish movement from a gender perspective. Moreover, in order to get at a profile of "women politicians", I did a survey oriented to women activists of the legal party, HADEP. The research was published in 2007 by the title of *Analar Yoldaslar Tanricalar Kurt Hareketinde Kadinlar ve Kadin Kimliginin olusumu* [Mothers, Comrades, Goddesses: Women in the Kurdish Movement and the Constitution of Woman Identity] from Iletisim publications in Istanbul. From now on, references concerning the study will be directly made to the book.

since the mid-1990s, I had the chance to closely follow Kurdish women's participation in politics. The above-mentioned observations that I made from the "inside" had let me gain insights regarding the patriarchal oppression and control that women are subjected to as well as their resistance to it, when I was at the stage of formulating the framework of my research. As a "Kurd", I had been viewing my research issue from the "inside", yet I needed to create a critical distance to my research from the "outside" through my "woman" identity. This, I did thanks to my readings of feminist theory. Therefore, as a study formulated from both an insider's as well as outsider's point of view, *Feminist Perspektiften Kurt Hareketinde Kadinlar ve Kadin Kimliginin Olusumu* ["*From a Feminist Perspective Women in the Kurdish Movement and the Construction of Woman Identity*"] has been a challenging and transformative process for me (and perhaps for the participants of this project as well), precisely because it was carried out from within the tensions that were brought about by such a subject position. Hence, after I conducted this research, I was not at the same stage, where I was at the beginning.

One can notice that here "the view from the inside" contradicts with positivist methodological principles such as objectivity and free-of-value judgments. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that unlike the assumptions of positivist methodology, in my study there is not a clear-cut line between "researching subject" and "researched object".[33] This is because studying Kurdish women as political agents was not separate from the position of the researcher.

As I was laying out the research in this way, my point of departure was the following: nation-based political and ideological processes have been gendered in a way in which women have

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[33] For a feminist critique of the positivist methodology and its clear-cut division between research subject see: Marie Mies (1983).

been subordinated, yet these processes cannot be reduced solely this influence. Such a simplification would bear two potential disadvantages: first, one could miss the point that Kurdish women could intentionally prefer a political stance oriented to the elimination of unjust treatments originating from the official identity politics in Turkey. And second, their potential to resist patriarchal practices in the Kurdish movement could not be seen. Yet as was shown earlier, Kurdish women's experience of oppression emanating from their woman identity and the impacts of official identity politics have been overlapping with one another. On the other hand, although Kurdish identity politics has the characteristic of reproducing women's subordination, this should not prevent one from seeing women's self-defining roles and potentials of resistance in the processes which can be called a power practice. Indeed, as feminist historians show by means of their critical approaches to the dominant historical narratives, just like the other oppressed groups, women have not been merely passive recipients in any historical process or they cannot be reduced to the victims of these processes.[34]

A Method of Making the *Invisible* Visible: Oral History

The well-known post-colonial feminist critic Gayatri Spivak (1988), with her famous question "can the subaltern speak?" questions the ability of the subaltern to speak, she underlines the fact that social hierarchies and relations of power prevent the sub-altern's voice from its access into the public circulation and hence, she draws attention to the necessity of developing a methodology that would be make it possible to go beyond relations of power in order to reach this voice. In this sense, one should emphasize the fact that Kurdish women's voice was not heard in the public sphere did not necessarily mean that such a voice did not exist. Therefore, one need to make use of a method, which would make Kurdish women visible and

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[34] For a feminist critique of the dominant historical approach, see Scott, Joan (2000).

their voices audible in order to find an answer to the following questions: how have Kurdish women got out of their houses and the boundaries drawn by their traditional gender roles and turned into political agents? What factors have played a role in their participation in politics? What kind of a relationship is there between the construction of Kurdish identity and woman identity? What kinds of social, political, and personal experiences lie behind Kurdish women's identity? Why and how have women assumed this identity?[35]

It would not be possible to reach these voices by means of quantitative methods and techniques such as questionnaires/surveys or by an analysis of published documents. Surveys could probably provide a profile of participants, however, only by such a method one would not be able to get satisfactory information regarding Kurdish women's subjectivities and the factors underlying their political participation. Moreover, it was necessary to analyze the political and ideological texts of the Kurdish movement in order to examine the relationship between the construction of Kurdish identity and woman identity; and also in order to examine the impact of women's political participation on the construction of Kurdish identity. However, it was clear that one should not be limited with such an analysis which was based upon the statements of the leaders.

Therefore, in addition to using the above-mentioned methods and techniques, I eventually decided to use the methods of oral history and life stories in order to go beyond the limitations mentioned above. I did oral history interviews with forty women who participated in the

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[35] I touched upon the methodology pursued in this study. Yet, in seeking for answers of the above-mentioned questions, I should point to the contributions of theoretical framework of the *new social movements*, which makes it possible to view collective identity as a process of social construction and to examine collective identity, collective action and actors in their simultaneous interaction with one another. One of the significant scholars of the *new social movements approach*, namely, Alberto Melucci (1995: 52-57) points to the analytical advantages of defining collective identity as a process of social construction, he indicates that in the collective action, collective identity draws attention from the top to the bottom. Hence, he emphasizes that such an approach would require one not to focus merely on the discourse of the leaders or their visible actions, but also would be helpful to examine the invisible dimensions and to hear the voice of the voiceless.

process of the mobilization of the Kurdish movement. One of the crucial advantages of the method of oral history is that it helps one capture both the individual and social levels of the reality (Cakir, 2002: 30; Corfield, 1996; Rithchie, 1995). Undoubtedly, there are constraints of doing oral history as well. The criticism about oral history method focuses on subjectivity and the question of representation. Another point of criticism is the risk of getting stuck to the everyday life. Compared to quantitative methods, it is true that the method of life stories has a problem of representation, yet still it is possible to reach the knowledge, which has such a depth and quality that is not possible to acquire by quantitative methods. It is well known that oral history has been very useful in doing exploratory researches especially about women or minorities who are invisible in the public domain. Indeed this corresponds well to the position of Kurdish women: Due both to their ethnic identity and gender identity, Kurdish women have been a doubly invisible category in the public domain. As to the critique of subjectivity, one can point out that the reliability of written documents can be questioned as well (Danacioglu, 2001: 134; Neyzi, 2004).

It has been possible to overcome the problem of getting stuck into subjectivity and everyday experiences by means of placing life stories in a broader context. In this study, I have tried to deal with the personal and the social in interaction with one another. I have investigated the connections between women's specific experiences and processes of identity construction on the one hand, and the connections between collective identity and processes of the movement on the other. Following such an investigation, I have tried to examine the ways in which all these have interacted with each other in social, political and cultural context and transformed one another. Hence, on the one hand, I have included in the research the social and political structure and transformation in the specific historical setting; on the other hand, by means of

an analysis of political and ideological texts I have tried to capture the clues of the interaction and transformation regarding Kurdish women's political participation.

When one thinks of women's life stories in such a context, one can see that a process of invisible *praxis* emerged. This process of praxis took place on the intersection of the public and private areas and during this process women turned into political agents. Oral history made it possible to view the area at the intersection of the public and the private domain, and thus it provided a broader perspective regarding women's participation in politics. Therefore, one can see that the followings have played a significant role in the emergence of women's political agency in the public sphere: women's experiences in everyday life, their lived grievances, their sharing these grievances in their families, which they turn into a source and justification/reason for their needed motivation in their participation in politics; the interaction in the web of relations with relatives and neighbors, such as visits paid to relatives in prisons or the funerals of politically engaged relatives or visits to their graves.

The web of solidarities that women developed against the violation of the rights of their own relatives or neighbors and their political rallies in these webs, in time turned to the advocacy of the rights of a broader community rather than just that of their relatives and neighbors. A good example in this regard is the "mothers for peace initiative" in Diyarbakir [*baris anneleri insiyatifi*]. While this initiative was originally started by women whose sons/daughters were lost or in prison. They originally started it in order to defend their children's right to life, yet in time it evolved to an organization for the defense of the right to live peacefully for the entire society.

Although "Kurdish woman" identity was a construct like all other collective identities, it had a real history composed of personal, social and political processes. What constituted the history of this identity were the pressures and obstacles against this identity and the injustices they lived as a result of carrying this identity. The reason for their adoption of this identity was not restricted with political and ideological factors and their personal histories with this identity. Oral history interviews showed that by means of this identity, women acquired the opportunity to get into the public sphere, to gain prestige or the freedom of movement. Following the framework of the definition provided by Icduygu and his colleagues (1999); and Gunduz-Hosgor and Smits (2002), (2003); while women were deprived of the opportunities of going out into the public domain, communication with the outer world and socialization; thanks to the process of political mobilization based on Kurdish identity, they attained this kind of socialization opportunities that were otherwise inaccessible for them "Kurdish woman" identity has paved the way for them for novel social and political experiences.

The impact of women's participation in politics was not only limited with themselves; but it also affected the gender discourse of the political movement as well as the new mode of the construction of Kurdish identity. Examined from the point of view of women's political participation, the political and ideological texts of the movement were moved from such a binary as *slave/free*, towards a discourse with an emphasis on *free woman*. Moreover, from a gender perspective, Kurdish identity has been redefined from within a more egalitarian construct.[36]

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[36] Undoubtedly, one cannot claim that this is a completed process. The gender construct of collective identity is a process that is open to continuous redefinition through relations of power and actors' struggles.

Another finding of this research is that the process of political mobilization led women to socially and psychologically feel stronger. Contradicting the approach of *victim*, this finding made sense by means of the transformative power of action. Going into the public sphere and activism, led women to redefine themselves. Through their actions in this area, they started to view themselves as agents having their own rights. The assumption of Kurdish identity in collective action let them gain a holistic understanding regarding the sources of the problems whose effects they feel and define in everyday life and how to solve these problems. Indeed this understanding did not remain limited with only their ethnic identity; depending on their age, educational level and experience/relationship with women's movement, they also gained a consciousness concerning their status of womanhood and the position of women in general. At the center of the Kurdish identity discourse of the Kurdish movement laid the demand for *equality* and *rights*. Women adopted this discourse and transformed it in a way in which to include gender equality as well.

One can give the following example from the statements of one of the middle-aged interviewees. She was continuously subjected to violence by her husband who has been in leadership of the HADEP (the political party working for the recognition of cultural and identity rights of the Kurds). She was illiterate. She believed she had her own rights as well, since throughout thirty-year political activism of her husband, they paid the entire price together, such as arrest and forced migration. In her opinion, it was a contradiction not to have the right to have a say at home for women. This contradiction, for her, would also make "the struggle for rights of the Kurds" unsuccessful.

> "They [men] will always talk and we will listen. Until this tradition of Kurds does not change, equality, freedom will not come for Kurds. These, this violence within family will [have to] go away, if not [it is] futile."

With such a consideration in mind, she made a complaint about her husband to the HADEP:

> "Upon my complaint, he became better. That is he used to feel ashamed in the party. I wanted him to feel embarrassed. I said "*since you were saying I am in this cause, in this way, you cannot do injustice to your son, daughter and wife*. Whatever you have suffered [in this struggle], I, too, have suffered alongside you" (Caglayan, 2007: 216).

These words show that the informant assesses domestic violence through the terms of "oppression/oppressed", "injustice/struggle for rights", "demand for equality", which are provided by Kurdish opposition. There were also other informants who referred to the HADEP against the violence of their husbands working in the HADEP. Women's demands for their rights through the use of the HADEP's discourse of rights and equality, evokes the resistance strategy of the oppressed, about which James C. Scott (1995) talks. In this strategy, the oppressed force the dominant to act in line with their own public discourse.

Amongst these politically active women, particularly those relatively young and aware of the feminist movement, wanted to be recognized and represented not only by their Kurdish identity but also their woman identity. While I was doing my fieldwork, the woman branches of the legal political party and the other organizations in the Kurdish movement were highly influential. For instance, they were working hard to have approved a 30% of quota for women in all decision-making and leadership organs of the DEHAP. When one takes the written documents of this party and its predecessors together with narratives of women activists in these parties, one can see that there is a progress parallel to the increasing participation of women. Women had to fight an intense struggle against sexist and marginalizing practices in order to be influential in decision-making and leadership organs of the party. It was a result of this struggle that in the local elections in 1999, three mayors get elected from amongst women in three towns, where there was a very strong tribal organization and in the 2004 elections the

number of woman mayors increased.[37] As I was doing the fieldwork, in almost all of the municipalities (mayored by the DEHAP) through women's research and implementation centers (founded within these municipalities) or women's cooperatives, women were provided legal consultation, rehabilitation, free health care and moreover, there were courses orienting women for jobs. In addition to these institutions tied to municipalities, there were other women's organizations that defined themselves as *independent women's organizations*, albeit ideologically close to the Kurdish movement. These organizations ran works against domestic violence, honor-killings and they were interacting with the women's movement in Turkey.

Undoubtedly, one cannot make a direct connection between these developments empowering women and women's emancipation. Moreover, as was mentioned earlier, parallel to the other domains of their lives, women have been discriminated against in Kurdish politics as well. Yet this should not mean to disregard the following consequences: the same political mobilization got them out into the public domain, let them feel valuable, socialized them and provided them with the opportunity to have access to new outside channels, including the feminist movement. In order to be able to oppose the discrimination they were subjected to, before everything else, they had to get out of the boundaries of the private domain and the Kurdish movement provided them with this opportunity. Needless to say, emancipation requires a different process, but still in the current state of affairs they are not victims mobilized by the process of nationalist mobilization. On the contrary, participating in politics with their own rational preference, they have been political agents who have been aware of the opportunities of socialization and empowerment provided by the nationalist mobilization despite the latter's sexist features.

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[37] One of them is the first and only woman mayor in Turkey.

Conclusion

According to positivist epistemology, ordinary people's lives have no epistemological value. What is notable is categories such as institutions, leaders, written documents and discourses that can be enter the circulation in the public realm. The method of oral history made it possible to re-claim agency for "Kurdish women", who have not been in any of these categories and it showed that with all their heterogeneity, they can be analyzed. More strikingly, oral history showed this with its reliance on the knowledge of everyday life and life stories, both of which have not been as a proper source of knowledge from the point of view of positivist epistemology. This knowledge has showed that even though the voice of women cannot be heard in political processes, women cannot be reduced to victims. Moreover, it has showed that the clear-cut distinction between the private and public domains would deprive one of a comprehensive understanding while analyzing political phenomena.

One of the important findings of this study is that both the identity constructs of the Kurdish movement and the identity of "Kurdish women" are not stable, unchanging and one-dimensional. Women's participation in politics has influenced Kurdish identity constructs as well. Like identities, their subject positions were not defined beforehand. Collective action, collective identity and agent have mutually constructed each other. The picture is not a fixed, well-determined one; rather, it is composed of quite dynamic, interactive and multiple processes. Being women and Kurdishness are not totally separate and opposite spheres of women's identities. Being women and Kurdish were two mutually constructing, dynamic and interactive dimensions, which were in tension and even at times in conflict with one another. The Kurdish movement and women's movement played a simultaneous role in women's constructing themselves as agents claiming their rights through their both Kurdish and woman

identities.[38] It has been important to reveal this configuration as well, because the demands for women's rights of the women active in the Kurdish movement was seen as "feminist deviation" and thus, disregarded. Likewise, the feminist movement too, viewed Kurdish women's demands for women's rights alongside their Kurdish identity as "nationalistic". Indeed, Kurdish women's demands did not *appear* in the women's movement throughout the 1990s. This picture was also reflected in the works of feminist academics. For instance, in two important edited volumes on women's movement in Turkey, namely, *90'larda Turkiye'de Feminizm* [Feminism in Turkey in the '90s] (2002) or *Yerli Bir Feminizme Doğru* [Towards an Indigenous Feminism] (2001), the experiences of the women under consideration *escaped observation*. A similar *disregard* was also seen in Aysegul Altınay ve Yesim Arat's (2007) research on violence against women in Turkey, which contains the most recent and comprehensive findings. In this study, by oral interviews, the authors have examined the experiences of women's organizations, how the latter approached the issue of violence against women and their methods of struggle. In this research report, little place was reserved for the experiences of Kurdish women's organizations and their ideological closeness to municipalities/Kurdish movement is underlined. Viewed from a level of abstract generalization, the criticism implied by the emphasis placed upon this *closeness* might sound just and accurate. Nevertheless, when one does not abstract it from the given social and historical context and approaches it by keeping in mind the previously mentioned relations of power and oppression, the *ideological closeness* of these women's organizations can be taken both as *understandable* and as a stage amongst many stages in a dynamic and contingent process, even if not approved.

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[38] For another study supporting this finding, see Yuksel, Metin, (2003)

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