

**THE AWAKENING OF KURDISH WOMEN WITHIN KURDISH  
NATIONALIST MOVEMENT: WOMEN AS SUBJECT,  
WOMEN AS SYMBOL?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the fundamental role of Kurdish nationalist movement on revival of Kurdish women movement in Turkey. Kurdish nationalist movement which concern women as a symbol of liberation opens a space for Kurdish women leads to emergence of womanhood consciousness among women as an unintended consequence. Further, the historical overview of Kurdish question and Kurdish nationalist movement and in addition the implications of nationalist discourse towards women are analyzed in the context of Kurdish women movement. Thereby, the conceptualizations of feminism and nationalism which become significant both in theoretical and practical are considered in order to understand Kurdish women political activism especially after 1990s. In order to point out the motives behind their political activism, to analyze their relationship with nationalism and Kurdish nationalist movement and their relationship with feminism and the feminist movement in Turkey, in-depth interviews are conducted with political active Kurdish women. By this way, I aim to reveal the specificity of Kurdish womanhood experiences that is mostly related to their ethnicity to be Kurdish.

## ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Kürt milliyetçi hareketinin Türkiye'deki Kürt kadın hareketinin uyanışında oynadığı temel rolü incelemektedir. Kadına kendi içinde bir yer açan, özgürlüğün bir sembolü olarak ele alan Kürt milliyetçi hareketi niyet edilmemiş bir sonuç olarak Kürt kadınları arasında kadın bilincinin ortaya çıkmasına yol açmıştır. Buradan hareketle, Kürt sorununun ve Kürt milliyetçi hareketinin tarihsel gelişimi ve buna ek olarak Kürt kadın hareketi bağlamında milliyetçi söylemin kadına yönelik anlamlandırmaları analiz edilmektedir. Bununla birlikte, özellikle 90'lardan sonra ortaya çıkan Kürt kadınının politik alandaki hareketliliğini anlayabilmek için hem teorik anlamda hem de pratik anlamda belirleyici olan feminizm ve milliyetçilik kavramlaştırmaları üzerinde durulmaktadır. Kürt kadının politik hareketliğinin arkasında yatan nedenleri ortaya çıkarmak, onların milliyetçilik ve özellikle Kürt milliyetçi hareketiyle olan ilişkisini, feminizmle ve Türkiye'deki feminist hareketle olan ilişkisini inceleyebilmek için politik olarak aktif olan Kürt kadınlarıyla derinlemesine görüşmelere gidilmiştir. Bu şekilde, Kürt kadınlarının Kürt olmaktan kaynaklanan kendine has kadınlık deneyimlerini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktayım.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Kurdish nationalist movement has been claiming to advocate the “emancipation” of Kurdish people since 1980s, consequently it has been considered as a landmark in transforming Kurdish women’s life. It has played a vital role in creating a space for Kurdish women who have asserted they have faced double oppression because of being women and being a minority. Kurdish nationalist movement has encouraged women to demand their rights and to struggle for gender equality in their own community. Therefore, the main premise of this study is to highlight the historical parallelism and causality between Kurdish feminism and Kurdish nationalist movement. In other words, Kurdish nationalist movement concerning the women as a symbol of liberation has played a significant role on the revival of Kurdish women movement.

In this study, I will analyze the relation between Kurdish nationalism and the construction and reproduction of gender relationships within the Kurdish community in detail. Kurdish nationalist movement constitutes a starting point in order to understand the Kurdish women movement in its historical entirety and development. From this standpoint, a rough framework of the past events and the rationale behind Kurdish nationalism will precede the emergence of the Kurdish women movement.

Since 1990s, the Kurdish nationalist movement has instilled the consciousness of to defend the right to equality between men and women within Kurdish community. However, I argue that Kurdish nationalism undermines the gender equality because of giving precedence to the national liberation. At this point, it is impossible not to ask questions like what extent the

women's needs and demands are accommodated; the fundamental human rights of them are ensured; and their opinions, needs and interests are taken into consideration within the movement. This is also a highly controversial issue that constitutes a substantial part of this research.

Kurdish nationalist movement is characterized by male-dominance in which the leadership and the management are constituted mostly by men. It is pointed that at the root of Kurdish movement, women and their problems have been excluded for a long time. However, since 1990s it has been observed that there is a growing emphasis on Kurdish nationalist discourse for the liberation of women on the purpose of getting support from all parts of their society. The oppression of women in Kurdish society has been identified with the oppression of Kurds. Therefore, the leadership of nationalist movement declares that they have struggled for double liberation.

As other nationalist discourses, the Kurdish nationalist discourse portrays women as the guardians of their customs and traditions. That is, women are assigned to the task of enhancing the community's common sense of history and culture. In addition, women have to stand side by side with men and share the same common ethnicity. These traditions have put the women in a subordinated position; so the question of gender equality has been ignored for the name of national liberation. Further, because of availing the nationalist cause, there emerges the question of to what extent women are allowed to question the subordinated position they are in. This study aims to reveal the tension between the aforesaid. Even some Kurdish women, like some of my interviewees, express that the emancipation of Kurds determines the emancipation of the women.

I will concentrate on the interconnected dynamism between the realities of Kurdish women's life characterized by the high degree of gender consciousness with that of Kurdish nationalist movement. Since 1980s, Kurdish nationalist movement has contributed to some radical transformations in the definition of Kurdish identity and the roles of women in Kurdish community. However, how much the gender consciousness of Kurdish women practiced in reality is examined in this study.

In due regard, I will adopt the following methodological sequence: Firstly, the theoretical framework of feminism and nationalism will be provided; then the history of feminism in Turkey is analyzed within the context of Kurdish women movement. To draw parallelism between the feminism and nationalism with reference to the context of Kurdish nationalism will make my study more challenging since Kurdish nationalist movement has been considered as one of the most persistent nationalist movements of the twentieth century.

After analyzing the Kurdish women movement in all aspects, there appears a strong relationship between nationalism, ethnicity and gender. In other words, it is realized that nationalism serves as the fundamental source of cohesion for Kurdish women. On the other hand, gender plays a central role on nationalist practices. In this context, it is critical to figure out that the gender is constructed in socio-political practices of Kurdish nationalist movement. From this point of view, in the context of Kurdish nationalist movement and Kurdish women movement the theoretical framework of feminism, nationalism and ethnicity have to be assessed to reach conclusions.

The last part of study is based on a fieldwork research on Kurdish women; a number of general observations are made as regards the situation of women in Kurdish society. In addition, I will try to capture the attention to the voices of women who have devoted their energies to politics. Methodologically this study will develop more on the plane of discourse

analysis, underlying motives behind the actions of women in Kurdish movement and relating to this movement their speeches about their objectives will be analyzed. I try to render the experiences of women through individual interviews held.

As mentioned before, Kurdish nationalist leadership pioneers as well as actors of Kurdish women movement have claimed that Kurdish women in Turkey have faced the double nature of oppression because of being as women and as a minority. Therefore, in Turkey Kurdish women have expressed that they both have struggled for ethnic or national recognition and gender equality in Kurdish community. On this occasion, the existence of publications and organizations of Kurdish women have proved that women have power to challenge the status quo and defend gender equality. Additionally, they have become more visible in the Kurdish community.

The driving force of Kurdish women movement is marked mainly by nationalism. This means nationalism has brought women together and also encouraged them to participate in the nationalist movement. The nationalist movement which has opened spaces for women's participation on the other hand, it has served to silence women when they appeal to gender and social equality. That is to say, the liberation of women has assumed secondary position for the pioneers of the nationalist movement. In other words, in Kurdish nationalist discourse, national liberation comes first.

Furthermore, the goals of Kurdish women movement can be explained as following: The protagonists of Kurdish women movement aim to destruct the male domination in Kurdish society. They scrutinize the unequal relations between men and women as enhanced by the patriarchal system in Kurdish society through their publications and meetings that are arranged by respective organizations.

In this study, Kurdish women's journals and organizations, which enable to trace the Kurdish women movement through its historical and conceptual entirety, are considered as main sources and references. Kurdish women movement has mainly exposed itself through publications as journals of *Roza*, *Jin û Jiyan* (Woman and Life), *Jûjin*, *Özgür Kadının Sesi* (The Voice of Free Woman) and *Îstar* and organizations as *Gökkuşağı Kadın Derneği* (Gökkuşağı Women's Organization) and *Selis Kadın Derneği* (Selis Women's Organization) and *Özgür Demokratik Kadın Hareketi Platformu* (the Platform of Free, Democratic Women Movement). By this way, women both have announced their voices in the Kurdish community and have participated in Kurdish nationalist movement. In addition, political parties' women branches and women's groups are other examples of women's organizations that have been active in the political arena. From this standpoint, the women who have taken part in these activities are interviewed, thus it is aimed to map out their experiences within Kurdish women movement. By embarking on such a research, I will try to examine the current state of feminist practice of the Kurds who are accepted as the "largest stateless nation of the world" by some authors and actors.

The last point that I would like to underline is; the class dimension of oppression and subordination is not taken into consideration in this analysis for the simple fact that it becomes secondary in the case of Kurdish women. The main forms of oppression and subordination of Kurdish women in Turkey are based on ethnicity and gender. So, without class dimension of oppression and subordination, it is possible to claim, in consequence of having doubly oppressed and subordinated position Kurdish women have the potential to reshape and initiate the policies that concern the Kurdish issue and feminist movement.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, in order to reach a proper conclusion, different methodologies are employed during research. The research practices applied in this study are descriptive (to explain the concepts of ethnicity, feminism, nationalism and identity) and exploratory research (to gather information about Kurdish nationalist movement and Kurdish women movement). As the methods of data collection, literature surveys serve as a theoretical foundation for the formulation and implementation of the study, in-depth interviewing, textual analysis, interpretative analysis and written sources are employed in order to gather and analyze information.

For the implementation of the study, I made in-depth interviews with eight Kurdish women in relation to the research topic. The interviews lasted around one hour to three hours. All the interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed. I got in contact with these women through personal relationships and Kurdish networks especially *Gökkuşacağı Kadın Derneği* (Gökkuşacağı Women Foundation). The latter presented a great help in reaching out these women. That means that I had reached these women who have taken active roles in the Kurdish women movement by the snowball technique.

The questions that are directed to women in in-depth interviews are formulated into three sections. In the first part, I aim to find out personal information, social and political activism of interviewees. In the second part, the questions are designed to point out women's experiences in relation to political activism and their relationship with Kurdish nationalism. The aim is to get information about political mobilization of Kurdish women within the

Kurdish nationalist movement which at the end has brought the awareness of gender identity among Kurdish women. The third part of questions consists of questions that concern to get views of women about the conception of feminism in general and whether their activities are evaluated in the context of feminist movement especially to find out how they position their activities after 1990s.

I have prepared these questions on the basis of my previous readings about Kurdish nationalist movement in the particular, on Kurdish women and on my analysis of the women's journals, namely, *Roza*, *Jin û Jiyan* (Woman and Life), *Jujîn*, *Özgür Kadının Sesi* (The Voice of Free Woman) and *Îştar*. In addition, my readings concerning both theory and practice of nationalism and feminism are other sources that provide information and background that help me design the questions at ease.

# **THE KURDISH QUESTION IN TURKEY**

## **1.1. General Information about Kurds**

In this part, I aim to give some information that related to language, religion and history of Kurds in order to provide a meaningful framework about Kurds in Turkey.

The Kurds are, together with the Arabs, Persians, and Armenians, one of the most ancient peoples of the Near East. Approximately 24 million Kurds are spread across Turkey, Iran, Syria, Iraq, and the countries of the Caucasus. Language is perhaps the factor that most characterizes the Kurdish people today. The Kurds have their own language which is Kurdish. Kurdish is an Indo-Iranian language, bears similarities to the Persian spoken in neighboring Iran (and very dissimilar to Arabic and Turkish, both of which belong to separate language families). Kurdish is, however, divided into numerous dialects, not all of which are mutually intelligible. Generally speaking, the two most important Kurdish dialects are Kurmanji (sometimes called Bahdahnani, after a nineteenth-century emirate) and Sorani. Kurmanji is spoken in Syria, Turkey, and the northern most portions of Iraq; Sorani is spoken in northwestern Iraq and Iran. Many Alevis in Turkey speak Zaza, a language more closely related to the Caspian languages of Iran than to Sorani or Kurmanji (Mutlu, 1996: 518-519). Most of Kurds are Sunni Muslims.

Kurds calls their homeland “Kurdistan”. The term "Kurdistan" first appeared in the fourteenth century, but like many regions before the rise of nationalism, its boundaries shifted through time to time (Nikitine, 1991: 23). Today, the area claimed as Kurdistan spans 500,000 square kilometers--roughly the size of Spain--and stretches from the center of Turkey to the southern



Caucasus and then southward along the Iran-Iraq border. Kurdistan literally means "land of the Kurds," but the area is not homogenous and contains Arabs, Turks, Persians, Assyrians, and Armenians, among others. Many Kurds live outside Kurdistan as well. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the shahs of Iran's Safavid dynasty transferred Kurds to Khorasan what is now northeastern Iran, conscripting them to guard the frontier against marauding Uzbeks (Avery, 1991: 4-5).

## **1.2. A Historical Overview of Kurdish Question in Turkey**

In order to enhance the understanding of the Kurdish question in its present dimensions, a summary of its historical and geographical background is necessary. Therefore, in this part I try to point out the historical processes lie behind the emergence and rising of Kurdish nationalism.

Before underlying the historical processes that have brought out the Kurdish nationalism I want to concentrate on the concepts of nation and nationalism. Nationalism is not taken in primordial terms, rather the concepts of nations and nationalisms are considered as the products of modernity and they are of a particular social and historical construction. Gellner notes industrialization as the prominent process that prepared the ground for nationalism. In this connection he expresses: "Nationalism is rooted in a certain kind of division of labor, one which is complex and persistently, cumulatively changing" (Gellner, 1997: 57).

"In the modern world, everyone can, should, will have a nationality as he or she has a gender," maintains Benedict Anderson, the foremost theoretician on the emergence of nationalism. In *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, he suggests that, as a social and political construct, nationalism must be

associated with other realities, such as family and religion, rather than with ideologies, such as liberalism or socialism. Anderson's assumptions often lead to questions regarding gender and sexuality, even if he does not address the questions directly.

Anderson brings the roots of national consciousness and nationalism to the development of print-as- commodity and in this development capitalism has the primacy (Anderson, 1983: 37). He defined the concept of nation as “it is an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, 1983: 6). It is imagined since an individual member of even the smallest nation will never meet or hear all of the other members of the nation. It is limited since it has finite boundaries and thus, it is exclusionary. Actually the sovereignty of the nation was born in the age of Enlightenment and Revolution, “which were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained hierarchical dynastic realm” (Anderson, 1983: 7) and were replacing the nation as the source of sovereignty in the embodiment of the sovereign state. And “finally, it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, 1983: 7).

Additionally, Anthony Smith (1986) looks at the ‘ethnic origins of nations’. While agreeing with the ‘modernists’ that nationalism, both as an ideology and as a movement, is a wholly modern phenomenon, Smith argues:

The ‘modern nation’ in practice incorporates several features of pre-modern ethnics and owes much to a general model of ethnicity which has survived in many areas until the dawn of the ‘modern era’. (1986: 18).

The mainstream texts concerned with theories and concepts of nation and nationalism point out to the fact that they are the constructions of specific social and historical contexts.

However, the main problem in these conceptualizations of nation and nationalism is, the gender differences and especially women issues are ignored, “women do not reap long-term benefits as a result of their involvement in nation building efforts” (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tétreault, 2000: 3).

### **1.2.1. During the Ottoman Empire**

The relationship of Kurdish women with feminism in 1990s the historical evaluation of Kurdish national movement after 1980s is underlined in the rest of this research, however, the social and political issues that have brought out the Kurdish question and Kurdish nationalist movement go back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire.

Historically, Kurdish nationalism has emerged in the late Ottoman period. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire generally meant the rise and institutionalization of Turkish nationalism and the subsequent foundation of Turkey. However, the demise of the Empire was a turning point not only for the evolution of Turkish nationalism but also for the rise of Kurdish nationalism. While the majority of the Kurds in the Middle East had been governed by the Ottoman Empire before twentieth century, they began to be subjected to the authority of different and newly rising nation states in the region following the demise of the Ottoman Empire. It was through this process that Kurdish question acquired its trans-state character.

There are two historical moments that had played a significant role in the evaluation of Kurdish nationalism. The first one is the establishment of Republic of Turkey in 1923. The second one is the armed struggle of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) that started in 1984.

These two moments can be considered as the turning points in the historical development process of Kurdish question and Kurdish nationalism.

In fact, the history of Kurdish nationalism appeared at the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire. But, the rebels of 19<sup>th</sup> century did not have ethnic characteristic, rather they conveyed more tribal and religious characteristic. The rebels in 19<sup>th</sup> century were against the centralized policies of the Ottoman Empire. In this connection, the policies of Ottoman Empire led to the appearance of Kurdish revolts and politicized the ethnic identity of Kurds. In this context, Yavuz states:

Attempts at centralization during the nineteenth century politicized peripheral ethnic identities. Most of the Kurdish tribal revolts against the central government resulted from tribal reactions to the intrusive and centralizing policies of the modernization policies of the Ottoman state and the Republic of Turkey. These centralizing policies in terms of monopolizing violence and education threatened tribal autonomy and the interests of the ağa or seyyid (Yavuz, 2001: 5).

Furthermore, as Yavuz figures out the first religious-tribal revolt was the revolt of Şeyh Ubeydullah that occurred in 1880 (2001: 5).

### **1.2.2. From the Proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923s to the 1980s**

After the First World War the Kurdish -populated areas were divided between four countries. There were Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. In this study I concentrate on the Kurdish question in the Republican Turkey. With the establishment of the Republic, the Kurdish nationalist movement transforms to another stage. In the Ottoman Empire there was “millet” system. With the establishment of Turkish Republic there realized a radical transformation from millet (religious community) system to the construction a nation and nation-state. In the Ottoman

Empire, the social division was based on religion rather than ethnicity and/or nationality whereas nationality became very basis of the Turkish Republic. In this context, Cornell notes:

[In the Ottoman Empire] Collective identities were based primarily on religion –Islam at the broadest level and various religious orders and sects at the local level- regional or clan-based units. The Turkish Republic, by contrast, was modeled upon the nation-states of Western Europe, particularly France. It was guided by six “arrows” or principles enunciated by its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: republicanism, nationalism, secularism, populism, etatism and reformism. Among these, the first three principles form the foundations of the republic (Cornell, 2001: 2).

After the establishment of Republic of Turkey, the Kemalist regime was determined to build a Western-type secular nation-based on Turkish national, linguistic and cultural identity. For this reason, the establishment of the Turkish Republic has taken a significant role in the rising Kurdish nationalism especially its assimilation policies fostered the Kurdish nationalism. On this occasion, İçduygu et al. states:

Since its founding in 1923, the Turkish Republic has pursued aggressive assimilationist policies towards its Kurdish minority. The new republic was based solely on Turkish culture and identity, and hence did not permit the expression of Kurdish identity and language within its borders (İçduygu et al., 1999: 993).

From this standpoint, the Kemalist Revolution’s nation and nation-state building strategies and its assimilationist policies played a significant role in the emergence of Kurdish revolts in the 1920 and 1930s’ Turkey. As Chaliand (1994:36-39) indicates until 1938 there were seen three Kurdish rebellions in Turkey. These were Şeyh Said Rebellion in 1925, the Mount Ararat Revolt in 1930 and the Dersim Revolt in 1936-38). As İçduygu et al. figures out:

These early rebellions, according to most observers, were probably more religious and tribal in nature rather than ethnic nationalist. Religious and traditional Kurds had little appetite for a

secular Turkish republic and tribal leaders resented the new state's encroachments on their authority and power (İçduygu et al., 1999: 993).

In McDowall view, many conservative elements in Kurdish society distrusted the Turkish leadership's opposition to the caliphate, the traditional seat of Islamic rather than nationalist rule (McDowall, 2000: 188). With the Greeks rebellion, Ataturk turned his attention to building the new Turkish nation-state. Wary of perceived Kurdish disloyalty at a time of crisis and fearful of the potential secessionist threat arising out of the Mosul vilayat dispute; Ataturk offered the Kurds little flexibility in the design of the new state. Turkish became the sole language of both state and education (McDowall, 2000: 191).

The years after the Dersim Revolt in 1938 were quiet years until the early 1960s. However, with the 1960s the religious and tribal characteristics of Kurdish nationalism started to secularize and the Kurdish nationalism was articulated with the leftist/socialist movements of the time. From this standpoint, Yavuz expresses within the broader leftist movement in Turkey in the 1960s and 1970s the Kurdish identity has secularized and transformed as a result of interaction with socialist ideology (Yavuz, 2001: 9). Furthermore, there appeared a disagreement between Kurdish and Turkish leftists on Kurdish question. Thus Kurdish leftists started to organize separately. As Entessar notes:

For Kurds, the goal of socialist revolution and Kurdish nationalism were not incompatible; they had to be pursued simultaneously. The Turkish left, on the other hand, considered Kurdish insistence on ethnic recognition as counterproductive, divisive and ultimately detrimental to the survival of the political left. They contended that ethnic recognition would be achieved under the proletarian leadership of a socialist Turkey. The sides parted company and the Kurdish left sought to organize separate political parties (Entessar, 1992: 92).

### **1.2.3. The period from 1980s to Onwards: The Emergence of PKK**

The crucial turning point in Kurdish nationalism is the emergence of Kurdistan Worker's Party. The historical dimensions that brought out PKK trace back to the seventies. In Turkey, the seventies and the early eighties could be described as the "revolutionary" era. Many Kurds participated to these "revolutionary" organizations, which were considered to be Marxist-Leninist, Stalinist or Maoist. PKK, Kurdistan Workers' Party, was born from this situation. The Kurdistan Workers' Party survived the repression following the 1980 coup, and launched its first attack against Turkish military targets in 1984 with a small of guerilla. Further, the PKK is distinguished from other Kurdish political parties by its social base, which includes a sizable portion of peasants. It advocates both socialism and independence for greater Kurdistan, and put a priority on armed struggle. Furthermore, in the context of emergence of Kurdish nationalism with the leadership of PKK in the 1980s Mango notes:

The PKK produced its first programme, in which it defined itself as a national democratic revolutionary movement based on an alliance of workers, peasants and intellectuals, aiming at destroying 'colonialism' and creating 'a democratic and united Kurdistan' which would eventually be based on Marxist –Leninist principles (Mango, 1994: 988).

PKK began with big aims and objectives employing a number of strategies new to the Kurdish people. The pioneers of the movement declare that they struggle for the rights of the Kurds in Turkey and they give impression that PKK fights for the liberation of the "greater Kurdistan." Yet, the movement has gradually fallen into the same trap that almost all movements using armed struggle fall into. Thus, it failed to achieve the original goals it set for itself. Indeed PKK's aims were reduced from the objective of liberating the "greater Kurdistan" to willing to give up armed struggle in return to "living together in a democratic republic within Turkey." In other word, PKK's declaration of the aim of establishing a

separate state was not adopted later on. On this occasion, Gunter indicates the statement that made by longtime leader of PKK, Abdullah Öcalan:

When he declared a unilateral ceasefire in March 1993, for example, Öcalan stated, ‘Turkish-Kurd brotherhood is about 1000 years old, and we do not accept separation from Turkey’. Rather the Kurds in Turkey ‘want peace, dialogue and free political action within the framework of a democratic Turkish state’. Complete democracy would not only solve the Kurdish problem within Turkey, but also fulfill the ultimate goal of Atatürk- the founder of the Turkish Republic- for a modern democratic Turkey that would be accepted as a member of the West (Gunter: 2000: 4).

In addition, Kürkçü notes, throughout the years the targets of the PKK have been changing and in 1994 March the leader of PKK “Abdullah Öcalan” expressed in an interview that he does not defend the idea of being separated from Turkey and he said that this is the best solution for Kurdish people (Kürkçü, 1996).

However, whatever its ultimate goal, it is a historical fact that the PKK politicized and radicalized ethnic nationalism in Turkey, be it Kurdish or Turkish. As Yavuz claims:

The PKK played a critical role in rising Kurdish political consciousness, establishing a web of networks in and outside Turkey to recruit militants, undermining the religio-tribal structure of the region by presenting new opportunities for the middle class and urbanized Kurdish youth, and unexpectedly popularizing and consolidating Turkish nationalism in Turkey (Yavuz, 2001: 11).

Öcalan was captured by the Turkish military in Nairobi, Kenya on 16 February, 1999. Despite the first reaction of the PKK to the arrest of Öcalan was the use of mass violence, later on “at the 7<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Congress of the PKK in Northern Iraq on 7 February 2000, the leadership of PKK decided to give up the armed and adopt a democratic struggle” (Yavuz, 2001: 15-16). But the KADEK was established as the continuation of PKK. Compared to the



PKK, it adopts less intense stance, though it still continues an armed struggle against to the Turkish military forces.

There has been an intense discussion recently concerning nationalism in the Kurdish liberation movement in general and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in particular. However, the gender dimension of Kurdish nationalist movement has rarely been studied. Therefore, in this study, I concern the feminist dimension of the Kurdish nationalist movement.

### **i) Gendered Dimensions of the Kurdish Question**

In this section, after a brief of overview of the emergence and development process of the Kurdish question and Kurdish nationalism, I would like to turn my attention on the Kurdish question in relation to the thesis of the study. Thus my study will take into account the gendered aspects of Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey.

Essentially, the discussion on Kurdish question has brought out that the basic reason behind the Kurdish problem is not economic or terrorist rather it is ethnicity and identity. However, this study does not limit itself to such an assumption. Further the dominant literature that concerns the Kurdish question assumes that all Kurds are one type mass that is completely the same or they are divided according to characteristics of linguistic, territorial, tribal, religious and sectarian. Apparently, the division in terms of gender has been ignored by the dominant literature that is concerned with the Kurdish issue.

On the other hand, gender has a significant place and role in terms of the assimilationist and oppressive policies towards Kurds. Kurdish women present a position in-between. They are represented as symbol and reproducers of cultural homogeneity of Kurdish nation in nationalist discourse on the other hand; they have faced assimilationist policies of Turkish state which aim to homogenize nation-state. For the Kurdish nationalists, women protect original cultural values of Kurds and transmit them from generation to generation through bearing children according to peculiar characteristics of Kurdish culture and in this sense they contribute to the ethnic, national and cultural differentiation of Kurds by keeping cultural homogeneity inside.

The conditions that the Kurdish population lives in prepare the ground for an ethnic and nationalist mobilization. The Kurdish population faces much worse conditions than the Turkish population in the country. The material needs such as access to income, education, health, land and state resources and non-material needs such as instruction in Kurdish language, culture and belonging security are not satisfied. From this standpoint, there is a big gap between Kurdish men and women in terms of material and non-material security they have. The case of the military conscription of men indicates that Kurdish men hold relatively more advantageous position than women because of their different gender roles. In comparison to the men of the same ethnicity Kurdish women face a more oppressive process because of their gender. As being the bearers of both Kurdishness and womanhood, Kurdish women experience double material and non-material insecurity. On this occasion, these facts have brought at core the question of gender and the Kurdish question in this study.

On the other hand, Kurdish nationalist movement has a significant impact on mobilizing Kurdish women. Kurdish women who have been mobilized owing to the Kurdish nationalism,

involved in political activities via Kurdish organizations and they have undergone a process of socialization within the Kurdish nationalist environments. They enter political discussions in these nationalist circles. Therefore, the Kurdish nationalist movement contributes to the politicization of the Kurdish women. In this connection, the argument of Jayawardena (1986) emphasize that the simultaneous rise of feminism within the nationalist movements was seen in the Third World, Kurdish nationalist movement contributed to the development of awareness of gender identity of its female members. That means Kurdish nationalism disrupts the feudal, traditional and backward Kurdish social and cultural structures that trap women. From this standpoint, the contribution of Kurdish nationalism vis-à-vis the Kurdish nationalist movement can have both positive and negative dimensions: As a negative dimension of nationalism McClintock claims: “All nationalisms are gendered” (McClintock, 1993: 61). On one hand, women are represented as the symbolic conveyors of the nation; on the other hand women are not given much maneuvering power to act and be influential within the national organizations. In Kurdish nationalist movement, women face a desexualizing attitude. The failure of Kurdish nationalist movement to ensure the equality of women has led the awakening of women who have increasingly questioned the Kurdish nationalist movement. Kurdish women started to have deep-rooted doubts as regards the attitudes of their male friends towards them.

## **ii) Position of Kurdish Women in the Nationalist Discourse from a Historical Perspective**

In this part, I will try to answer the following questions: how the issue of “woman” and the conceptions of gender are formulated in the nationalist discourse? What tasks do Kurdish women assume in nationalist movement? When did Kurdish women start to participate in

Kurdish movement? How have they become the symbol of liberation? To sum up, this part is about the relation of women with Kurdish nationalist movement from a historical perspective.

The historical analysis of Kurdish women is applied in order to trace out the status of women in Kurdish society. It is pointed out that the criticism of unequal gender relations started to emerge at the end of 19th century among Kurds in accordance with the rise of the idea of reform. The question of gender equality is raised by the literate nationalist males. Hacî Qadirî Koyî (1815? – 97), the pioneer of Kurdish nationalism, was the first person in history to support the idea of education for women explicitly (Hassanpour, 2001: 340).

Despite the fact that Kurdish society is a male dominant society; it is clearly seen that the Kurdish women have always been chosen to be in the charge of high positions as political leaders and military leaders when we look at the history. Even some women have become the national heroines. However, some women who have been hailed as a heroine and admired very much do not represent the equal position of women in Kurdish society.

The most well-known Kurdish women, Halepçeli Adile Hanım and Kara Fatma in history, had acquired leadership position which is often recognized as pertaining to the realm of men; Halepçeli Adile Hanım and Kara Fatma were the women leaders in one of the Kurdish tribes in Maraş (Bruinessen, 137). Some Kurdish writers state that the presence of such women tribe leaders justifies the fact that women in some areas had more equal position among Kurds in comparison to the ones in Middle East. Some Kurdish nationalists claim that women had equal rights in Kurdish tribes. However, they began to lose these rights after sovereignty of Islam or central Iran and Ottoman Empire (Bruinessen, 2001: 138-139). One of the well-known Kurdish nationalist writers Musa Anter published a short article entitled of “The Women’s Place in Kurdish History” (1991); in his article he states that in Kurdish society

there has been always a higher level of “traditional gender equality” (Bruinessen, 2001: 139). The first sentence of Anter exposes the situation without question: “It is understood from old literary works that in Kurdish society women have equal social value with men.” He continues that “in Islamic period Kurdish women were not forced to wear veil as other Muslim publics, besides they were not socially separated from men”. Even, except a few feudal rulers and aristocrats, Kurdish males were not polygamous (Bruinessen, 2001: 139). The strongest evidence of the equal position of women in Kurdish society is the presence of tribe chiefs. Anter also cites many examples from the well-known Halepçeli Adile Hanım to the famous women who live in his region “Mardin”. The most famous one is Perihan Hatun who had been the leader of Raman tribe until her sons come to an age to replace her position. The son of Perihan Hatun, “Emin” had been called “Eminé Perixané” which was his mother’s name not his father’s name during his leadership period in his tribe. This indicates that the position of Perihan Hatun was more important than that of her husband (Bruinessen, 2001: 139-140). Another example of powerful Kurdish women leader is “Şemsi Hatun”, the chief of Omeryan tribe. After the assassination of her husband, she became the chief of tribe and she had been on the leadership until her son Mihemmed replaced her position. Mihemmed did not use the name of his father; he was known as Mihemmedé Şemsé which was actually his mother’s name. The last example that was cited by Anter is his own mother “Fasta Hatun”. She was the leader of Temika tribe for about forty years until her death in 1963.

Anter refutes his claims with telling that these women who got the position of leadership after the death of their husbands. On the other hand, there is another reality that these women were not called by the names of their husbands or fathers; they used their own names. Halepçeli Osman Pasha was called “the husband of Adile Hanım”. There is another indicator that shows that these women overshadowed their husbands. It is that their sons were called not by their

husband's but their names (Bruinessen, 2001: 140). This means that women with their strong personalities could get a higher position. However, the insistence and emphasis put by some male Kurdish nationalists in their discourses on women's rights in Kurdish society through history is misleading since it conceals what they really want to say. That is to say, there is no necessity of liberation for women. However, the nature and the degree of this liberation depend to a large extent on their families' social status on a large scale. The women aforementioned were the members of aristocrat families and, although they were married, each of them got their own authority and power (Bruinessen, 2001: 145).

Anter presents his claims a little ironically with an unusual perspective. Anter tells about the respected position of women in Kurdish society. He points out that for women the number of their pregnancies plays an extremely important role in establishing a reputation. According to him, like a veteran of countless fights, Kurdish women are praised in an insincere way because of the number of children they have (Bruinessen, 2001: 146).

Anter's attempt to figure out the position of Kurdish women throughout the history is explained by Hobsbawm's concept of "invented traditions". Hobsbawm regards the concept of the "nation" and the associated phenomena with it; namely, nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest as a comparatively recent historical innovation (Hobsbawm, 1983: 13); he conceptualized the nation as "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm, 1983: 13). From this standpoint, by the concept of "invented tradition" he implies: 'invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies the continuity with the past (Hobsbawm, 1983: 1). In Kurdish nationalists' view, women were free and they could have high positions

in the society. Essentially, Kurdish society recognizes the gender equality, since it is affected from external factors such as the Islamic culture which have brought the changes in Kurdish society in opposition to the gender equality.

Kurdish women writer, Fatma Kayhan (1991) challenges the vacant discourse which is about the respected position of women with a less witty and furious tone. Kayhan put forward the opinion that like in other traditional societies, in Kurdish society women hold respect because of being mother or spouse, but not being as an individual. However; the respect of society does not safeguard them from being beaten by the male in their immediate family (husband, father, brother, or son). The conception of pride restricts the freedom of women (Bruinessen, 2001: 146).

It has been argued that all forms of nationalism are conservative because nationalism is constrained by patriarchy (Yuval-Davis, 1981). It is also suggested that nationalists are the new traditional setters and traditions-whether they are invented or real-are patriarchal (Nagel, 1998). In this regard, it can be argued that since nationalism is a modern project and it enables the recognition and reinvention of traditions, patriarchy as a manifesto is under constant reformulation so as nationalism is. This may explain why ethno-national projects in Kurdish movement represent a revival and celebration of traditional gender codes. The nationalist discourse and its policy have started to decode both gender relations and identities; which has changed the meaning and the understanding of the concepts of ethnicity and nation by attributing certain roles to women. On this occasion, the image of women in Kurdish nationalist discourse presents a dichotomy. In one hand, the modernization of women is defended; on the other hand, the protection of traditional aspects of women is aimed. Women are presented as the objectification of national and ethnic ideals. It has been declared that

Kurdish women are the bearers of Kurdish norms, traditions and resistance. The ideal woman is the one whose role is that of giving birth to sons who will become martyrs for the nation. Women are given value principally for their biological role and consequent contribution to the process of nation-building. In other words, women represent an objectified function whose role is described as the passive biological and cultural guarantors of the nation. In this context, feminist scholars like Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1989: 7-8) have pointed out the roles of women in national state. They say that they are the biological producers of the nation, reproducers of boundaries, transmitters of cultural values to children, symbolic signifiers of difference and active militants in nationalist struggles.

Mojab (2002) states in her article of “Thoughts on the Struggle against ‘Honor Killing’”<sup>1</sup> Kurdish nationalists have promoted the myth of the uniqueness of Kurdish women like some Western observers of Kurdish society; they claim that Kurdish women enjoy more freedom compared with their Arab, Persian and Turkish sisters. Whatever the status of women in Kurdish society, Kurdish nationalism, like other nationalist movements, has been patriarchal, although it has emphasized the idea of gender equality. For Kurdish nationalists, nation building requires the unity of genders, classes, regions, dialects, and alphabets. They consistently relegate the emancipation of women to the future, together with the emancipation of the nation. Kurdish nationalism, in or out of power, has generally entertained patriarchy and legitimated its violence; it has little respect for gender equality.

In nationalist discourse women are categorized in order to define their roles. The real Kurdish women, who live in rural area, are conveyor of their culture and have only the position of

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<sup>1</sup> Mojab, S. 2002. “Thoughts on the Struggle against Honor Killing”.  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0SBL/is\\_16/ai\\_n13784514](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0SBL/is_16/ai_n13784514)



mother whereas Kurdish women who live in big cities are educated and have other responsibilities which raise their status in their society. They participate to the political organizations. On the other hand, they are considered as to be assimilated and the ones who lose their cultural values and mother tongue. At this point, the expressions of Yuval-Davis bear significance in order to understand the role of Kurdish women in nationalist projects. She states:

Women, however, are not just the biological reproducers of the nation, but also its cultural reproducers, often being given the task of guardians of 'culture' who are responsible for transmitting it to the children and constructing the 'home' in a specific cultural style. Culture is used as a resource in various ethnic and national projects and in such projects, women are constructed as symbols of national 'essence', unity and emancipation as well as border guards of ethnic, national and racial difference. These constructions of womanhood are often used as resources for national relations of both domination and resistance. (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 116)

The major transformation in Kurdish women's life has appeared in 1980s with the rise of PKK. Because of the armed struggle and reaction to the Turkish state, Kurdish society has come across with deep-rooted problems such as economic difficulties, compulsory migration and increasing militarization. In this process, there have appeared new discourses and public descriptions on "our" and "other", "Turkish" and "Kurdish" identities. The new roles of women which have appeared in this process have brought some questions about the new image of Kurdish women to the surface. It is clear that there are rural Kurdish women on one side and there are others on the traditional Kurdish life style in rural areas. Besides, central cultural conceptions such as gender and honor have been questioned and accompanied by the appearance of new women images. In comparison to the past images of Kurdish women new meanings have been attributed to the image of them. In the discourse of PKK, Kurdish women as a guerrilla became the symbolic figure in the beginning of 1990s (Yalçın-Heckmann and van Gelder, 2000: 308-309).

The images and counter-images about women's position can be understood through the framework of modernization. The qualifications of "modern" and "non-modern" have not been made only by considering the differences between Turkish women and Kurdish women; but it has been also made among Kurdish women themselves. The distinction between rural and urban Kurdish women has been observed in this way: In the past, the rural was seen as the object and victim of pressure. Today, the rural women are placed in the position of "mother" thus they have enjoyed high self-esteem and more importantly they are considered to be the protectors of Kurdish culture, language and life style. Many politicized Kurdish women in the political organizations have expressed many times that the "real" Kurdish women are the women who live in the regions of southeast of Turkey, especially in the cities of Diyarbakır and Hakkari. On the other hand, the women who live in Istanbul complain that they are assimilated by the educational policies of the state. They say that this situation cause them to lose their values and forget their mother tongue. However, the discourses about authentic values and culture do not retain women in political organizations to criticize gender relations in Kurdish populated regions (Yalçın-Heckmann and van Gelder, 2000: 310).

In the nationalist discourse the description of being a Kurdish woman is still between continual arguments and in a state of flux. Sometimes they are represented as the victims of social backwardness, sometimes they are considered to be the icons of modern life or they are presented as the privileged conveyors of cultural authenticity. In addition, in the nationalist discourse the liberation of women has been frequently expressed. Kurdish nationalist movement leadership has been calling its people for double liberation by comparing the pressure that the women are subjected to in Kurdish society with the one that of the Kurds suffer from. On the other hand, Kurdish nationalist movement opens centres and facilitates

servicing to the participation of women so that they want women to behave outside the traditional roles and suppress their voice in favor of the national liberation while they ask for gender and social equality.

In the texts of PKK and speeches of Öcalan (1992) it is emphasized that the real beauty is related to being aware of Kurdistan in reality. It is a new concept created by PKK. The slogan which says, “Woman is becoming free through struggle, a free woman is becoming beautiful, the beautiful woman is loved,” becomes popular in the PKK. It reflects the new understanding of beauty and the role of women in this beauty. In this slogan, love does not mean a romantic relation between men and women. According to Öcalan a male guerrilla and a female guerrilla can love each other only if the target is realized. In other words, Öcalan states the way of the love relationship between men and women and he tells how it can be tolerated, he also says that, however this process has not been realized yet. Öcalan emphasizes the necessity of developing a new masculinity and femininity that is different from traditional understanding of masculinity and femininity. At this point, the major responsibility is imposed to women. Women have to break themselves from internalizing values of traditional family life which assigns them the status of an object or a slave. Öcalan expresses that despite these conditions, many young girls and women have participated in the Kurdish nationalist movement. The motivation of these women, especially young and unmarried ones, is to be committed to their homeland with pure love and the desire to liberate their homeland from exploitation, feudal values and patriarchy. It has been expressed that not only women, also men have to change themselves (Yalçın-Heckmann and van Gelder, 2000: 316).

The dominant system of values is reproduced and given an extra dimension within the context of the Kurdish national struggle. This liberation has brought some women private space and

assigned those untraditional roles, such as being a fighter; besides it has developed the patriarchal system in a special way. Men are conferred the role of leadership and they are elevated and idealized as heroic figures. In this connection, it is meaningful to stress that modern forms of hegemonic masculinity go hand in hand with hegemonic nationalism in culture and ideology. The micro culture of masculinity in everyday forms of patriarchy articulates with the demands of nationalism as well. This functions by reinforcing the imagery of masculine power, strength, blood, death and war embedded in the heroic soldier and breeding masculine cultural themes like honor, adventure, patriotism, cowardice and bravery (Tamir, 1997; Anderson, 1983; Noakes, 1998; Hedetoff, 1990; Saigol, 1998; Nagel, 1998). Women are identified with their natural characteristic 'fertility'. They are regarded fragile, weak and vulnerable, in need of men's protection. In addition, from the masculine view, women must be protected from "others" who can violate their boundaries, intrude inside and occupy them.

Although the nationalist discourse produces pressure over women, on the other hand it brings the chance of resistance. The fact that women started to participate in national organizations with national concerns creates the necessary conditions to be better organized to challenge male domination.

## **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF FEMINISM IN TURKEY UNDER THE LIGHT OF KURDISH WOMEN MOVEMENT**

In order to understand the Kurdish woman's feminism, the historical process of feminism in Turkey is highlighted. By following Tekeli (1995 b) in this context, there appears three periods. The first one is the one that starts from the half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. In this period which is called Ottoman women's movement there were discussions about the position of women in the family and society through the tools of associational and journalistic activities. The second period starts with the foundation of the Republic and it lasts until the 1980s. After the establishment of Republic it has been observed that women have taken important social and political rights in the early decades of the Republic. Many scholars have expressed in their interpretations, it is a weak period in terms of women's movement because the State played a determinant role in the articulation of feminism. The third period corresponds to the 1980s and 1990s. It can be stated that there was an autonomous and radical feminist movement in Turkey in the 1980s.

The period of from the 1980s onwards is considered as the second wave of feminist movement whereas the period of the 1910s and 1920s is depicted as the first wave of the feminist movement (Tekeli, 1998). This is made on the basis of the intensity of the events, activism and demands of women. Moreover, because of dominance of State feminism, there was almost no women's movement in the period until 1980s; therefore, she calls the period until the 1980s as the "infertile years".

## **2.1. The Period from the half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ottoman Empire to the Establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923: Ottoman Women's Movement**

The first period which is called the period of Ottoman women's movement (Çakır, 1996a) or the first wave of feminism in Turkey (Tekeli, 1998); one can speak of a women's movement in the Ottoman Empire in which women expressed their demands by means of journalistic and associational activities. In fact, in the first period the women are designated as "Ottoman women" that definition does not imply a homogenous category. They were divided in terms of their religion, social status and urban/rural position. From this standpoint, the activism of Kurdish women in the period of Ottoman women's movement is handled. The first association of Kurdish women was established in this period in 1919 in İstanbul. Its name was Kürt Kadınları Teali Cemiyeti (Association for the Advancement of Kurdish Women). The group was under the influence of Kurdish intellectuals from prominent families who were influenced by modern European ideas and the ideology of nationalism. The organization was founded for the purpose of "enlightening Kurdish women with modern thoughts and for reforming Kurdish family life." However, the organization was short lived (Alakom, 1998: 40).

## **2.2. The Period from the Establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923s to the 1980s**

In the second period, there were substantial achievements that are related to the women's emancipation and women's equality with men by the State. By the adoption of the Swiss Civil Code in 1926 women got equality with men in front of the law. In addition, in 1930 women

got the political rights to participate in municipal elections and in 1934 they got the rights to vote and following it, they got the right to be elected in national elections.

Kemalism realized the radical and social transformations, but it does not change the fact that it shares continuities with Ottoman past in terms of the perpetuation of the patriarchal norms of morality. In this connection Durakbaşa states, Kemalism despite its progressive ideology resulted in women's participation in education and the professional life did not alter the patriarchal norms of morality, and in fact maintained the basic cultural conservatism which characterized the male/female relations, despite its radicalism in opening a space for women in the public domain (Durakbaşa, 1998: 140).

Kemalist women's rights discourse is a modernist, progressive discourse and gives priority to accomplishment of the equality of men and women at the legal level; for this objective it ascribes the important leading role to State which enjoys internal harmony and peace. As Saktanber figures out, in Kemalist women's rights discourse national identity takes precedence over any other sort of identity. Particularly, it excludes the women's movements that are shaped around the demand of ethnic or religious identity. Also, it views the achievements within the frame of women's rights as the means of Kemalist indoctrination. In this context, it attributes the mission of political socialization to the education. (Saktanber, 2001: 332).

From this standpoint, it is understood that there was no place for Kurdish women in the period characterized by the Kemalist regime and its women's rights discourse. The significant points that are mentioned above, from the early years of the Republic onwards the voices of independent women's organization and their activities were repressed. Therefore, there has

not appeared autonomous women's organization until 1980s. However, there are counter views in this context as Berktaş claims the Republican regime opened a space for the feminism supported by the State. However, at the same time the Republican regime defined it and kept it within certain borders. Moreover, the women themselves had internalized the Kemalist-nationalist ideology and this was making it difficult for them to develop an independent consciousness (Berktaş, 1996: 760). To sum up, the Kemalist nationalist ideology's view of women hindered the appearance of autonomous women's associations and organizations.

### **2.3. The Period from 1980s to Onwards**

In the analysis of the feminist movement in 1980s and onwards, the main event that characterizes 1980s is the military intervention of September 12, 1980 that brought an end to the political life, since the political parties and groups were closed down and their leaders were arrested (Tekeli, 1989: 36). In contrast, it has been observed that the feminist activism increased in that period. There was a radical tendency for the women to question their oppression and subordinated position in the patriarchal and sexist social culture. As Arat notes there was a consensus in society that Kemalist reforms had emancipated women until the 1980s. This fact could not be contested. Not only the educated professional women agreed besides both educated and illiterate housewives who knew their daughters would benefit from the opportunities provided by the reforms. However, when a younger generation of educated women professionals who called themselves feminists challenged the tradition, the consensus broke down. In search of new cultural identities, feminists criticized that the project of modernity affected women. Their goal was not to seek equality with men in the public realm



but to question the heritage which maintained that equality. They were ready to commit to sacrifice and deny being Atatürkists (Arat, 1997: 103).

The emergence of organizational activism of women is the result of activities of consciousness-raising groups where women accumulate on the basis of politics and ideology (Bora and Günel, 2002: 8). Besides the meetings that were organized by consciousness-raising groups, women were informed about the feminist theories through publication. In addition, women organized conferences and discussion panels.

The journalistic and associational activities of this period can be summarized in that way. At first, they were given one page space in the journal of named *Somut* (Concrete) in which they made publications in the light of feminist principles. This experience lasted six months because when they faced criticism from the Orthodox they left *Somut* (Tekeli, 1989: 37-38). Furthermore, the *Kadın Çevresi Anonim Şirketi* (Women's Circle Anonymous Company) was founded by thirty-five women in İstanbul on March 8, 1984 for the aim of raising women's consciousness, to contribute the concepts that related to sexism and to find out these concepts in society and to decade them (Çakır, 1996b: 752). In addition, the journal of *Kaktüs* (Cactus) which is a socialist feminist journal started to publish in 1998 (Çakır, 1996b: 753).

Besides these consciousness-raising groups and publication activities there appeared consequential campaign and protest marches concerned with the oppression of women, it aimed to get attention of the public to the woman issue. In this connection, in 1986 a petition campaign was organized in order to force Turkey to be part of the contract on *CEDAW* (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Tekeli, 1989: 39). Furthermore, a protest march that was organized on May 17, 1987 in which 3000 women

participated was considered a very significant event because as Sirman notes it was the first time women went to streets for voicing their demands (Sirman, 1989: 1). *Kadın Emeğini Değerlendirme Vakfı* (Foundation for the Support of Women's Work) was founded in 1986 in order to enlist equal participation of women in the working life who do not have complete integration into the urban life and it aimed to solve their problems that they face in this process (Çakır, 1996b:752). In addition, *Perşembe Grubu* (Thursday Group) that was called a feminist group organized a meeting under the name of *1<sup>st</sup> Feminist Weekend Forum* in Turkey in Ankara in 1989. Women handled various issues in this meeting as the question of how to organize women's politics in the feminists' agenda and so on (Tekeli, 1989: 39). Besides, *1<sup>st</sup> Woman's Deliberative Assembly* was assembled in 1989.

Çakır figured out the feminists in 1980s tried to learn feminist theory and to bring the issue of women's oppression in Turkey's agenda through various activities as publications, campaigns, protests and meetings in the consciousness-raising groups. Therefore, it became an autonomous and oppositional movement in society (Çakır, 1996b: 753). However, the activism of 1980s did not continue at that level in 1990s. The 1990s is characterized with the institutionalization of the movement.

In 1990s there were a variety of journals published by women; these were *Eksik Etek* (Deficient Skirt), *Emekçi Kadınlar Bülteni* (Worker Women's Bulletin), *Martı* (Sea Gull), *Özgür Kadın* (Free Women), *Çağdaş Ana* (Contemporary Mother) and *Dolaşan Mavi Çorap* (Circulating Blue Sock). In addition, the monthly journal of *Pazartesi* (Monday) started to publish in 1995 (Çakır, 1996b: 756). Furthermore, for the purpose of giving shelter to the women who faced violence *Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı* (Purple Roof Woman's Shelter Foundation) was founded in 1990. Additionally, *The Directorate General on the Status and*

*Problems of Women* which depends on *Ministry of Work and Social Security* was founded in 1990 that means for the first time a branch at the governmental level aims to improve the position of women.

One of the significant aspects of 1990s was the appearance of Kurdish feminists and Muslim feminists. That signifies that the women who had not taken place in the feminist movement of 1980s transformed feminist demand in relation to Kurdish movement and Islamic movement. They started to organize in order to realize their demands. Kurdish women questioned both the patriarchy of the nationalist movement and the Turkishness of feminism in Turkey. On the other side, Muslim feminists were against elitist position of feminist movement. Thus they tried to expose that there was not a contradiction between the faith of Muslim and their rejection of being oppressed as a women (Bora and Günal, 2002: 8).

Kurdish women came together and they got organized around various organizations and journals which accelerated the political activism of Kurdish women from the 1990s onwards. The journals of Kurdish women were *Roza*, *Jujîn*, *Yaşamda Özgür Kadın* (Free Women in Life) and *Jin û Jiyan* (Woman and Life). On the other hand, Islamist women participated in political activities within the structure of *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party). In addition, they were organized around different foundations as Foundation of Our Ladies Science and Culture (Çakır, 1996b: 756).

The feminist movement of 1980s displayed a radical and autonomous character in which women explicitly defined them as feminists and came together in consciousness-raising groups. They questioned oppression position of women and they were against the violence that they were facing. They organized protest marches for their demands. Moreover, the

women's equality with men in the ideological discourse, Kemalism was criticized by women. In order to provide theoretical basis of the feminist theory and politics, the books were translated by women. However, in 1990s by the decreasing of activism of women, the institutionalization of the movement appeared as a characteristic of feminist movement of 1990s.

The fact is that the feminist movement in Turkey which has achieved major transformations and radical achievements has been criticized because of being ethnic-blindness. This criticism has been done because of its disregard of Kurdish women. This could be considered one of the major drawbacks embedded in feminism in Turkey.

The exclusion of Kurdish women mostly relates to the Turkish state discourse on the Kurdish question. In this context, Yeğen's statements on how the Turkish State avoided recognizing the Kurdishness of the Kurdish issue are very illustrative. He states that, the present study emerged from the dissatisfaction of the standard point of view that the Turkish State discourse is an ideological narrative one which misrepresents the Kurdish issue and conceals the exclusion of Kurdish identity. This standard conviction draws its strength from the striking silence of the Turkish State as to the "Kurdishness" of the Kurdish issue. Any examination of the discourse of the Turkish state discourse reveals that the Turkish State has consistently avoided recognizing the Kurdishness. Whenever the Kurdish question was mentioned in Turkish state discourse, it was in terms of reactionary politics, tribal resistance or regional backwardness, but never as an ethno-political question (Yeğen, 1996: 216).

The historical analysis of feminism in Turkey has brought out significant points as regards the disregard of Kurdish women by feminists in Turkey. In addition, as it is pointed out that the experiences of Kurdish women have been surpassed in the feminist literature in 1980s and

1990s. In fact, there is a rejection of the existence and experience of Kurdish women by Turkish feminists. Moreover, the issues of Kurdish women have been handled under the titles of “tribal women” or Eastern/rural women” that represents the Turkish state discourse on the Kurdish issue in the context of Kurdish women. Furthermore, Turkish feminists expressed, they all, as women, had been undergoing the common experience of oppression and subordination. However, the argument of Kurdish women is that they have been oppressed and subordinated differently from their Turkish counter-parts. That is to say, ethnicity is a main component that differentiates the position of Kurdish women.

## **KURDISH WOMEN MOVEMENT IN TURKEY**

Kurdish movement and Kurdish nationalism which have appeared after 1980s have played a significant role in enhancing the awareness of gender identity among Kurdish women. In other word, women have been politicized through participation to the political organizations which have brought the womanhood consciousness in further times. In addition, the political activism of Kurdish women is handled in the context of feminism. To extend, a fieldwork research is conducted in order to elucidate the thesis.

### **3.1. Women in Today's Kurdish Gendered Culture**

In this part, the gendered overview of the Kurdish culture and society is handled at large in order to point out the specific oppression and subordination experiences of Kurdish women.

Mojab's (2002) analysis on Kurdish society that is pronounced in her article of "Thoughts on the Struggle against 'Honor Killing'"<sup>2</sup> has brought forward the significant points about Kurdish society. As a traditional, patriarchal society it is possible to observe gender relations in Kurdish society are obviously male dominated. In other words, male dominated system is not peculiar to Kurdish society. It is a common characteristic of traditional societies. Further, as other traditional societies around the world, in Kurdish society men occupy the authoritarian positions within the family and community. This system of domination is preserved through a strict process of socialization into norms and values which determine the rules of behavior for men and women. Thus, for example, women are required to dress

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<sup>2</sup> Mojab, S. 2002. "Thoughts on the Struggle against Honor Killing".

[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0SBL/is\\_16/ai\\_n13784514](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0SBL/is_16/ai_n13784514)

according to the collective taste and in addition they are largely confined to the private sphere of the “home”. Further, they are charged with the responsibility of bringing up children and doing all of the domestic work, even when they manage to gain employment outside of the domestic sphere. Additionally, they are called upon to embrace and reproduce the values that arrange their life to the taste of men, such as preserving virginity, getting married at an early age, tolerating the exchange of sisters and daughters and so on. To behave outside the logic of these norms and values means to enter a gamble; codes are hardly enforced. Deviance and dissent can bring about the destruction of the good reputation of a woman and her family, leading to social isolation, physical violence and even death. In addition, in practice the concept of "honor" is used as a justification for a wide spectrum of violent crimes against women. Women can be locked in their homes, ostracized and murdered after being victims of rape.

Furthermore, the freedom of women is often curtailed with the purpose of controlling their sexuality. According to of so-called "honor" as a traditional code, which function with many variants in different parts of the world, the conduct of women has the greatest potential to bring "dishonor" on the family. The threat of death or violence may be used to enforce these codes within the community. In many cases deaths are not reported; murders are made to look like suicides and covered up by families; and women are forced or induced to kill themselves. From this standpoint, Hasret who is one of the women is interviewed in the context of Kurdish women movement states:

The number of women who are killed under the name of “honor killing” is high. In the past there were also women who were killing themselves as today. However, in the past it was not heard, today it cannot be hidid owing to media. In Kurdish society there is still a male dominant system exercises which does not give any opportunity to women to reflect their voices. Women face terrible violence both physically and mentally. Men think that they have

the right to apply violence over women in order to protect their honor which leads to killing them. We try to destroy that mentality through our activities towards both women and men.

Another point about oppressed position of women is that the bad conditions (social, political, and economic) of Kurdish people enhance the power of males on women. In this way although they are under pressure in many areas of their life and they are powerless, Kurdish men feel themselves powerful in their home. Kurdish women were treated as objects, they were subjected to men. There did not have the right or the authority to express them neither in public nor in private sphere. Throughout centuries women have become slaves of traditions which have imprisoned women to domestic sphere.

Moreover, the conflict has emerged in the southeast of the Turkey between the Turkish armed forces and the armed opposition group; the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has polarized and fragmented communities. Women continue to suffer as war victims themselves, loss of family members-their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons-and as displaced peoples. Forced internal migration has destroyed livelihoods, eroded the agricultural sector and arrested development in the region. In this context of institutionalized violence, crimes against women in the southeast both within the family and outside of it have been ignored. In this context, the members of *Gökkuşacağı Kadın Derneği* (Gökkuşacağı Women Foundation) indicate that most of the women who apply to their foundation for getting help came from Southeast and East regions of Turkey. Because of the conflict in these regions inhabitants who are Kurds were forced to leave their homes and villages to immigrate to big cities as to become displacement in the big cities. At this point, the conditions of women become harder and harder. They are kept in their home, which breaks off their relations with outside world. Though in the home, they are subjected to the violence of the male members of their family who are mostly unemployed.



As a result, I can conclude that the women's opportunities to determine their social, economic and cultural development were extremely restricted.

### **3.2. Two Well-known Kurdish Women Figures After 1980s**

In this section, two political figures are handled in terms of their political activism in Kurdish nationalist movement. Because of their female identity, they have drawn more attention in the analysis of Kurdish women movement. I want to mention here that according to the interviews and readings I have gone over it is obvious that Leyla Zana is positioned as a respectable figure whereas Kesire Yıldırım is considered as a negative one.

#### **3.2.1. Kesire Yıldırım**

Despite its discourse on providing gender equality or freedom of women in Kurdish society, in reality PKK does not so much give place to freedom of women. Along years Abdullah Öcalan has faced various difficulties in accomplishing his leadership. However, those who contravened to leadership of Öcalan died or they disappeared. The most serious threat against his position came from his ex-wife Kesire Yıldırım. She was one of founders of PKK. She was the only woman in the constituent group. However, according to the confession of Öcalan, Kesire Yıldırım attempted to take his place by overthrowing him from presidency and this attempt was about to result in success. After this, she escaped to Europe to get alliance with his opponents and she tried to establish an alternative council abroad (Bruinessen, 2001: 149).

The conflict between Abdullah Öcalan and Kesire Yıldırım puts her in a position where she is seen as a modern version of historical heroine examples as Adile Hanım and Meyan Hatun. Kesire Yıldırım had got her powerful position at least at a certain level due to her husband's reputation. That was, she became a reliable alternative to her husband's position. Yet there are some differences between Kesire Yıldırım and well-known women in history. In contrast to other women, Kesire Yıldırım does not have a prestigious family. She started her political career to be an activist student as her male colleagues who had similar backgrounds. Kesire Yıldırım surpassed her predecessors by attempting to overthrow her husband in order to take his place. She became unsuccessful; however, she demonstrated the idea of that a woman could be a political leader with her own power (Bruinessen, 2001: 149). However, the interviewees' expressions indicate that she is not taken into consideration as a significant figure by the women. They express that she did not struggle in the name of women. As Reyhan who is one of the interviewee states: "Kesire Yıldırım is a negative example because she wanted to overthrow Öcalan for the sake of her own not of Kurdish women."

### **3.2.2. Leyla Zana**

Leyla Zana was born in May 3, 1961, in Silvan near Diyarbakır. She got married with Mehdi Zana who was also a political prisoner in Turkey during the military coup d'état period.

Leyla Zana who came to the scene as a wife of a Kurdish leader has been transformed into one of the important Kurdish characters. Zana who comes from a modest family forced to get married with a distant relative when she was 14. Her husband Mehdi Zana was 20 years older than her. At that time, Mehdi Zana took an active role in Kurdish politics. He was elected to be the mayor of Diyarbakır in 1977 in the second year of their marriage. He was the first

Kurdish nationalist who was charged as an official duty in Turkish state. After coup d'état period of 1980 he was relieved of duty and judged with the accusations of being "separatist". He was sentenced to 11 years in prison (Bruinessen, 2001: 150).

Leyla was 19 years old when her husband Mehdi Zana was arrested. She was growing up her two children. She could speak Turkish a little bit. She struggled for her husband by working with lawyers in the court, visiting her husband in prison, representing him in front of Turkish and foreign media and giving speeches in the public meetings. During that period her Turkish was improved and she was acknowledged with the legal system and politics. Actually, she learned how to establish the communication with public. This made her the spokesperson of Kurdish national issue. Following it, she joined the political party, HEP in 1990 which is the first legal Kurdish party already founded. After that, she became one of the important faces in the political arena. Zana was elected to the Turkish Parliament in 1991 from Diyarbakır. In the first day there when she stood up in the speech desk to take her parliamentary oath, she started to speak in Kurdish. She was wearing a headband with the colors of the Kurdish flag. This way of showing Kurdish signs inflamed antipathy towards her and had been banned until 2002, the year in which a limited, relative freedom was obtained. This does not mean these "signs" did not provoke any reaction. At her inauguration as an MP, Zana reportedly identified herself as a Kurd. Although the parliamentary immunity protected her, after she joined the Democracy Party, the party was closed and her immunity was stripped. In December 1994, she was arrested along with Hatip Dicle, Selim Sadak and Orhan Dogan, the four other Democracy Party MPs, and charged with treason and being a member of the armed Kurdistan Workers' Party. Zana and the other MPs were sentenced to 15 years in prison (Bruinessen, 2001: 150).

Leyla Zana who was the first Kurdish women deputy elected to parliament for the Democracy Party (DEP) in 1991 has become a symbol of Kurdish women. She was known in the international platform. After her political activities, Mehdi Zana has mentioned as the husband of Leyla Zana. She has a reputation that she was the one who introduced the Kurdish national rights to the world (Bruinessen, 2001: 151).

To illustrate, the historical examples (as mentioned before) who paved the way to the acceptance of women in the leadership roles in Kurdish society have actually made the doors open for today's women like Leyla Zana who work effectively in leadership positions.

### **3.3. A Study on Kurdish Women's Political Activism and the Feminism in 1990s in Turkey**

In addition to the detailed methodology provided at the beginning of my dissertation I want to give some information about the interviewees before starting to tell about their life, experiences and opinions that I had learned by my in-depth interviews with them.

All the interviews, except one, I had are realized by the active women's organizations. The women whom I interviewed are between 30s and 40s. Only one of them is married. All of them had been politically active in the 1990s. Most of them started to political activism through political organizations. The ones who have rural backgrounds among them came to İstanbul from East and South East regions of Turkey. They have different education backgrounds: one is a university graduate, one left university, and two of them continue their education through open-high school. The rest are high school graduates.

Furthermore, in the rest of the study I am going to concentrate on the political activism of women. In the case of Kurdish women the concept of “political activism” is used in terms of getting involved in politics.

### **3.3.1. Clash of Identities “Gender” and “Ethnicity”**

After interviewing Kurdish women who have been active participants in the women movement, there appear significant findings in the context of their relationship with Kurdish nationalism and feminism. Although there were not a big number of women representing the diverse population of Kurdish women in my interviews the experiences of respondents could give an idea concerning the full picture of political activism of Kurdish women in the 1990s.

The women participated in politics through political organizations at first became sensitive about the women issue later on. The respondents who are aware of their womanhood identity have expressed that they feel sympathy for the Kurdish movement because of their own ethnic Kurdish identity.

Besides their similarities, Kurdish women have differences in their political ideas and their understanding of feminism. In the context of their relationship with feminism it is noteworthy to explicate how they express their activism and what concepts they use to name their activities either implicitly or explicitly. In this connection, I want to mention not only feminists and but also non-feminists. In addition, in order to identify the role of the ethnic identity in Kurdish women practices I take into account again two different understanding; Kurdish feminist and feminist nationalist. The expressions of interviewees on feminism and the feminist movement in Turkey and also their expressions on nationalism and the Kurdish

nationalist movement become the main sources while collecting the ideas according to being a feminist, a non-feminist, a Kurdish feminist and a feminist nationalist.

The four categories that I have applied to understand Kurdish women's relationship with feminism are feminist, Kurdish feminist, non-feminist and feminist nationalist. However, such a categorization does not mean all of Kurdish women in Turkey are politically active or women in the same category have same political ideas and preferences.

In this study, feminism both as a theory and movement is a significant tenet in understanding of Kurdish women's experience of oppression and subordination in Turkey. However, such a use of feminism does not dispose feminist category into privileged position over others.

The women's perceptions and relationship with feminism and feminist movement in Turkey and nationalism and Kurdish movement are major factors in the categorization of Kurdish women that have mentioned above. Such a categorization not only made on the basis of women's self-perceptions and self-identifications even some of them do not identify with any categories. I take into account the inner consistency of responses and expressions of the respondents.

A significant point about categorization is that while from the non-feminist towards feminist categories the criticism of feminist movement in Turkey becomes lessened, the opposition towards nationalism becomes radical. At this point, two major categories (feminists, non-feminists) become apparent at first sight. However, these two categories sub-divided into two parts those are feminists and Kurdish feminists on one side, non-feminists and feminist nationalists on the other side.

Women in the non-feminist category do not define themselves as feminists and they put a distance towards feminism. In addition, they criticize the practice and understanding of feminism in Turkey. For women in the category of feminist their identity to be feminist precedes all other identities. But they express their identity of Kurdishness is also important for them. The implications behind the conceptualization of feminist nationalist and Kurdish feminist can be explained in this way.

The concept of feminist nationalist presents a proper analysis of situation of Kurdish women who vacillate between their gender and ethnicity. On one hand, these women have a strong sense of identification with their national group; on the other hand they fight for what they define as the rights of women. In the category of Kurdish feminist, the sharpness of the criticism towards feminist movement is lessened and nationalism is regarded with exclusionary terms in compare to the feminist nationalist.

From these standpoints I want to sign that one of the respondents is regarded as feminist, two of them as Kurdish feminists, one as a non-feminist and four as feminist nationalists. The respondents who divide into categories in their views can be listed with their names as follows. The feminist woman is Sultan. The Kurdish feminists are Zeynep and Hatice. The non-feminist woman is Ceylan. The feminist nationalists are Selma, Reyhan, Hasret and Gülten.

Instead to give different information about four categories I will scrutinize these four different categories that Kurdish women put forward along two issues. The first issue analyses women's relationship with concept of nationalism and how they view nationalism and

Kurdish nationalism in Turkey. Later, I will examine their political mobilization within the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey. The second underlies Kurdish women's views on feminism and feminist movement in Turkey in addition to how they define feminism and themselves. Further, their relationship with Turkish feminist women is also concerned around this issue. At the end, I will bring to light the Kurdish women's specific experience of oppression and subordination they face in Turkey.

Except non-feminist who does not display an exact prejudice against feminism however her opinions on feminism are shaped by her experiences with feminist women in Turkey, the rest of respondents define themselves as feminists, or Kurdish feminists, or independent feminists. They all attribute positive meaning to feminism.

Feminist nationalists who emphasize on anti-racism and opposition to racism in their discourse state; anti-racism is the precondition of being a feminist. In feminist nationalists view besides feminism is the best ideology for the liberation of women however it is insufficient in terms of ethnic emancipation of women that brings forward the question of difference in feminism. For Kurdish feminists, feminism is a worldview that is concerned with all forms of domination and subordination in the world. For feminists, feminism is an ideology that struggles against the sexist system. In compare to other Kurdish women feminist woman has more information on the history of feminist movement in Turkey.

In this study, the main indicators of how the women identify themselves with feminism are the consistency of their answers, their perceptions and their relationships with feminism in general, besides their perceptions and relationships with feminist movement in Turkey in particular. At this point women are defined as feminist or non-feminist. Kurdish feminist



women do not criticize nationalist movement strongly; however, it is not possible to hear from them that they pronounce nationalism in affirmative terms. In addition, for feminist nationalist women, the meaning of feminism and nationalism has been constructed of a women-centered viewpoint. Women usually define their rights within the cultural context that is related to their national concerns.

It is important to examine the role of ethnic identity in the feminist discourse of Kurdish women to find out whether their ethnic identity precedes their all other identities or not. For all participants their ethnic identity to be Kurdish is an important determinant in identifying themselves. On the other hand, there are not clear-cut borders between gender identity and ethnic identity in their expressing of which one takes precedence. That means the boundaries between their gender and ethnic identity is blurred in their minds.

In order to understand the experiences of Kurdish women, how they are oppressed and subordinated in Turkey, it is necessary to examine the activism of Kurdish women under the scope of Kurdish women movement in Turkey. I refer to the discussion around the approach of feminism both as a theory and a movement. Feminism which is considered as the theory of political, economic, and social equality of the sexes is noted by Hartsock as “an important epistemological and tool for understanding and opposing all forms of domination- a feminist standpoint.” (1983: 283)

Feminism which is regarded as the theory and movement advocates the political, economic, and social equality of all people. While at the theoretical level it deals with the analysis of the oppression and subordination of women, it aims to overcome the oppression and subordination of women at the level of the movement. Moreover, there is not a homogenous

and/or unified feminist theory. In contrast, there is a heterogeneous set of theories. In this connection, the feminist theories can be listed as liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, existentialist feminism, postmodern feminism (Tong, 1992), Black feminism (Hooks, 1992, 2000; Carby, 1997; Collins, 1998, 2000, 2001; King, 1997; Amos and Parmar, 2001; Corrin, 1999) and ecofeminism (Mies and Shiva, 1993; Warren, 1997). Despite the oppression and subordination of women to be common characteristics in all feminist theories they are different from each other in the context of their conceptualizations and the solutions that offer to overcome the oppressive relations that women face. In this connection, liberal feminism emphasis on women's getting equal with men in legal and political terms (Whelehan, 1995), Marxist feminism claims, it is the class that in the last instance better accounts for the women's oppression and subordination (Tong, 1992). For socialist feminism it is simultaneous impact of the class and the gender by means of which women's oppression can be best explained (Tong, 1992). Moreover, feminism defined as "a social and political movement to undo patriarchal domination of women" (Farganis, 1994; 15).

After a brief introduction to feminism, I will underline the relationship between Kurdish women feminism and Kurdish nationalist movement through applying the relationship between feminism and Marxism.

Kurdish women movement or Kurdish feminist movement developed within the nationalist movement has faced some problems concerning the movement. In some cases Kurdish nationalist movement and Kurdish women feminism have points in common like in the relationship between Marxism and feminism.

Heidi Hartmann claims in the article of “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism”, the leading article of the book of *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, that patriarchy and class are equally important and that neither a narrow feminism nor an economic Marxism can explain or change modern society. The other contributors of the book question the relationship between Marxism and feminism, sex, class and race, exploitation and oppression.

Lydia Sargent writes in the introductory chapter named “New Left Women and Men: The Honeymoon Is Over”, “the discussion about ‘failed’ marriage of Marxism and feminism came out of the experiences of women in the civil rights, new left, and women’s movement of 1960s and 1970s. The new left which debated, married, organized, and developed an analysis of U.S. capitalism and imperialism rejected the ‘old left’ and the tradition of communist and socialist parties with their attachment to the politics of the Soviet Union. It was a new kind of Marxism which attempted to integrate the student and youth culture that capitalist/imperialist ideology permeated every aspect of daily life: schools, work, music, television, film, community, environment, and especially sexual/social relations. But the role of women within the new left politics was limited to: “men will make the revolution and make their chicks.” (Morgan, 1977: 127) Women in the new left and civil rights organizations faced with two main problems: (1) the problem of day-to-day work (who cleans the office/ who messes it up, who writes the leaflets/ who types them, who talks in meetings/ who takes notes, who gains status through sexual relations/ who gives status through sexual relations) and; (2) the problem of theory (who leads the revolution, who makes it, who is liberated by it, and who keeps the home fires burning during it).” (Sargent, 1981: xii-xiii) Further, Sargent states women in the movement knew that “... the men in the movement (and in some cases the women) saw women’s function and legitimacy primarily through their participation in

traditionally “feminine” ways i.e., as movement wives, mothers, sisters, mistresses, secretaries, maids, waitresses, nurses, and sex objects.” (Sargent, 1981: xiv)

Similarly, Kurdish women who are encouraged to take part in the nationalist movement are not treated equally in the political organizations. In the nationalist discourse it is emphasized that a new Kurdish woman is the woman who liberates from the traditional roles; however, in practice women do not have equal position with men. Moreover, gender-related issues are undermined. As women expressed they do office work and they implement the directions that are determined by the men. In addition, the role of woman as a mother who grows up children and transmits Kurdish culture from generation to generation is highlighted more often by Kurdish nationalists. That is to say, the discourse of equality is remained in theory, it does not exactly transcend in practice.

Heidi Hartmann states: “The recent attempts to integrate Marxism and feminism are unsatisfactory to us as feminists because these subsume the feminist struggle into the “larger” struggle against capital.” (Hartmann, 1981: 2) In similar way, Kurdish women movement is taken beneath the nationalist movement structure in order to enlarge the nationalist movement and to increase the effectiveness of it during the struggle of national liberation. Another point is that Kurdish women struggle is not accepted as feminist struggle by the nationalist movement pioneers; instead it is conceptualized as the ideology of women’s salvation. Thus, by this conceptualization it is taken within the nationalist movement.

Sargent asks can radical, socialist, Marxist, lesbian, anarchist, and black feminists achieve equality in a left/ progressive movement whose dominant ideology is Marxism and can they achieve equality in a future society which is organized around Marxist theory and practice?

(Sargent, 1981: xii). The question that is asked for the left movement can be asked for the Kurdish nationalist movement. Can Kurdish nationalist movement whose aim is to realize the liberation of Kurds obtain the liberation of women or equality for women in its own Kurdish community? Kurdish women as interviewees express do not believe that Kurdish nationalist movement can remove oppression over women completely in the future.

Sargent underlines “when women continued to fight for equality in movement organizations, men turned to what they thought was the final crushing blow: the important political struggle is to stop U.S. imperialism; the important struggle is the struggle of the working class to overthrow the capitalist class. And so, the problem of theory arose.” (Sargent, 1981: xviii) That means both in theory and in practice women become invisible. From this standpoint, Kurdish women who establish their own organizations state they cannot find any convenient environment to struggle for equality in the political organizations in which they become political and recognize their womanhood. The primary issue is the struggle for the national liberation. Therefore the main duty of women which is determined by the pioneers of the nationalist movement is to be a patriot and act within the nationalist discourse.

Sargent expresses, “when women in the new left attempt to define sexism as a legitimate theoretical issue they were met by statements similar to ‘the best position for women is horizontal,’ women were faced three possible responses to new male left sexism. They could stay and struggle it out; they could split and struggle it out in autonomous women’s organizations; or they could do both: stay and go. Staying meant, at Sheila Rowbotham describes in *Women, Resistance, and Revolution*, ‘letting go of the explicitly female consciousness and pretending that the specific oppression of women does not exist.’ (Rowbotham, 1974: 12); going meant possibly isolating female consciousness from any other

movement for liberation; and doing both meant a split personality, split loyalties, split meeting time, split political analysis.” (Sargent, 1981: xviii-xix) As women in the left, Kurdish women started to search alternatives to get rid of male domination in the political organizations and make their own projects real. Therefore some activist women continue their struggle through establishing their organizations. While Kurdish women question the causes of sexual inequality between women and men and male dominance over women, on the other hand, the national struggle is also as much as important for them. They do not separate themselves totally from the political organizations; rather most of them still continue their political activities within these organizations.

In the left movement it is believed that women’s oppressed position will be disappear after the revolution. Thus women’s subordinated position is analyzed according to the class framework in which women are accepted as the part of the working class. Hartmann states that “the left has always been ambivalent about the women’s movement, often viewing it as dangerous to the cause of socialist revolution. When left women espouse feminism, it may be personally threatening to men supporting left ideas. They (left organizations) seek to influence women to abandon attempts to develop an independent understanding of women’s situation and to adopt the “left’s” analyses of situation.” (Hartmann, 1981: 31) She adds “many Marxists are satisfied with the traditional Marxist analysis of the women issue. They see class as the correct framework which helps to understand women’s position. Women should be understood as a part of the working class; the working class struggle against capitalism should take precedence over any conflict between men and women. Sex conflict must not be allowed to interfere with class solidarity.” (Hartman, 1981: 31) Similarly, in the Kurdish nationalist movement it is believed that women will be liberated from the oppressions related to both

their gender identity and ethnic identity after national liberation. For this reason; women should realize their struggle within the nationalist discourse.

Iris Young cites Hartmann who proposes a dual system theory to remedy the weaknesses of both traditional Marxism and radical feminism. She says that we must understand women's oppression in our society as an effect of *both* capitalism and patriarchy. Patriarchy is defined by Hartman "as a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women." (Young, 1981: 45)

In the case of Kurdish women, patriarchal structure of Kurdish society and Kurdish women's ethnic identity are handled as the main sources of oppression and subordination position of Kurdish women. In their struggle against the patriarchal structure of Kurdish community Kurdish women cannot get support from the political organizations and their voices are not heard by the men who are in administrative positions in the political organizations although it is emphasized that the nationalist liberation ideology is based on the ideology of women's liberation as well.

Christine Riddiough argues that Hartmann's definition of patriarchy fails because it does not explain *why* it is men who are dominant. (Riddiough, 1981: 75) Carol Ehrlich agrees with Hartmann that "feminist analysis by itself cannot adequately account for the systematic subordination of women. That is because we are not simply women: each woman is also of a certain class, race, nationality, age, and sexual orientation." (Ehrlich, 1981: 113) In addition, Ramazanoğlu states, while the theories of feminism show a complex picture, women themselves do not reflect a homogenous group. The differences that divide women are class, power, race, nationality, ethnicity, culture, ideology and sexuality (Ramazanoğlu, 1989). That

means there is not a unitary category of women nor was there a homogenous set of experiences of women. From this standpoint, we can question the differences among women. Thus, Kurdish women activists started to work for gaining consciousness among women that they are oppressed both as women and Kurdish women.

Lise Vogel expresses “my discussion of the socialist feminist literature constitutes an implicit critique of Hartman’s analysis and attracts attention to its insufficiency. Hartmann’s pessimism rests on a conviction that Marxism must inevitably remain sex-blind; therefore it cannot produce an adequate understanding of women’s situation. Hartmann suggests, furthermore, that socialist feminists have generally subordinated their feminism to their Marxism. In opposition to Hartmann’s reasoning, I would maintain that the problem is neither with the narrowness of Marxist theory nor with socialist feminists’ lack of political independence. Rather socialist feminists have worked with a conception of Marxism that is itself inadequate and largely economic.” (Vogel, 1981: 197)

Likewise, Kurdish nationalist movement concentrates on national struggle therefore it is incompetent in realizing women’s equality and also it is not effective in all Kurdish community. In addition, most of participants of Kurdish women movement still continue their political activities through political organizations. So, they do not give precedence to women’s struggle even sometimes national struggle becomes primary for them. For that reason, there appears a dilemma among women that the liberation of gender identity or ethnic identity becomes first. At this point, it is pointed out that sometimes there is a clash sometimes there is a combination of identities between “gender” and “ethnic” in the case of Kurdish women.



Under the scope of respondents' answers, at the first part of the rest of the study, the political mobilization of Kurdish women and the emergence of Kurdish women movement within the Kurdish nationalist movement are examined. In this context, women's relationship with nationalism in general and Kurdish nationalism in particular especially after 1980s is concerned. At the second part in which I aim to figure out the particularity of experiences of Kurdish women and their relationship with feminism, women's viewpoints towards feminism, their feminist practices and their relationship with feminist movement in Turkey. The main point is to find out specificity of the womanhood experiences of Kurdish women on the basis of how they endure the oppressed and subordinated position in Turkey.

### **i) The Political Mobilization of Kurdish Women within the Kurdish Nationalist Movement**

A significant point of the study is that women identify themselves with the nationalist project. Especially that was more prominent before rising of awareness of gender identity. On the other hand, the interviews with Kurdish women activists reveal a complex picture of motivation and experiences that leads to Kurdish women movement.

The women, who are interviewed as related to the thesis of study, reflected that they are different or they have specific womanhood experience because of their ethnic identity as a Kurd. The women who define themselves as Kurds have close relationships with some Kurdish political organizations and formations; even some of them have a membership with political organizations. The time that they have started to political activism is different from each other. Except one who has participated in political organizations in 1980s, the rest of respondents have become active in Kurdish nationalist movement after 1990s. All women

interviewees expressed that they have become aware of their gender identity as a woman within the Kurdish political organizations.

The respondents who are positioned as feminist nationalists attributed a positive meaning to the conception of nationalism which is one of the issues of the study. In this context, women underline the differences between racism and nationalism. They express that racism which is an extreme version of nationalism and does not give opportunity to the life of different ethnic identities is rejected by them. In this context, Hasret who identifies herself as a feminist nationalist woman states:

Nationalism is different from the racism in which the dominant ethnic group sees other ethnic groups as enemy. In my opinion everyone is nationalist at a certain level. At this point, nationalism means to love her/his nation and to defend her/ his nation's rights. If it is perceived like this nationalism can be useful otherwise it causes racism that brings the killing of members of other ethnic groups.

In addition, by expressing “nationalism brings together members of same nation for a common aim and it protects national identity” she attributes an affirmative function to nationalism. These expressions of Hasret imply that she does not feel herself in safe because of her ethnic origin and she is in need of coming together with other people who have the same ethnic identity. And she believes nationalism installs the sense of affection to members of the same ethnicity.

On the other hand, there are opposite views of nationalism. Zeynep who is positioned as a Kurdish feminist speaks about nationalism in negative terms. Nationalism implies some nations are superior to others because of their national origins. Therefore they believe they

have the right to govern and to suppress other nations. Further, another Kurdish woman Hatice claims:

Nationalism, not be as much as racism which also divides people with their biological and physical aspects but in a certain level it emphasizes the superiority of a nation to others. Therefore, it interferes to establish peaceful relationships among different ethnic groups.

In the question of whether it can be talked about the contradiction between feminism and nationalism or not; women express that feminism is the exact opposite of nationalism and it denies nationalism. At this point, Sultan who is identified as feminist woman says:

A woman who defines herself as a feminist cannot be nationalist. If she says she is a nationalist in this occasion she could not be a feminist because in nationalism there is an implication of the superiority of one nation over other nations and this is against the idea that feminism emphasizes the equality of all people. That means in contrast to nationalism, feminism subverts hierarchy among people.

In the context of contradiction between feminism and nationalism Hatice expresses:

In feminism, people are not divided according to their religion, language; race and so on... the common denominator is to be a woman. It is not important which ethnic group they belong, where they come, what they believe...

In the case of Kurdish nationalist movement, nationalism has played a significant role in mobilizing the Kurds around nationalist movement. The basic incentive behind the political mobilization of women is the national identity survived until mid- 1990s. That means at that time gender identity becomes secondary in comparison to ethnic identity. However, the later developments indicate that the Kurdish nationalism brought the development of awareness of womanhood among women. So, the point is that the women do not only struggle for Kurds'

emancipation they also struggle for equality of women. From this standpoint, a feminist nationalist woman Hasret emphasizes:

I started my political activism within a political party with national concerns. I think Kurds are oppressed because of their ethnic identity. But then I become aware of that as a woman we are also oppressed. In other words, it was imposed us that we should forget that we are women. I noticed this with my other female friends during the political activities within the political party.

In the question of how she realized oppression and what the implications of this oppression were, she continues:

Our demands were not regarded especially in the meetings of political organizations. The woman issue was considered as a secondary issue. There were no women at the administrative positions of the political organization. I think men fear to lose their power over women. At this time we become aware of our difference from men because of our gender identity. And our gender identity places us in an inferior position.

The situation of women within the political organization before appearing of awareness of womanhood identity is emphasized by all respondents. In addition, they state their struggle for their stand as a woman in the political organization brings the effectual transformations in favor of women's demands.

In the Kurdish nationalist discourse, Kurdish women's demands are disregarded by the Kurdish men for the sake of national goals. On the other hand, the women themselves who have mobilized through political organizations and become aware of the inequality that is raised from their gender identity do not question the male-dominated nationalist movement especially at the leadership level. In this context, a feminist nationalist woman Hasret states:

During my political involvement I have read many books that relate both Kurdish movement and women's struggle under the name of the feminist movement. Also, I read books that are written by the leader of national movement. The leader concerns the development of Kurdish women. His explanations represent many revolutionary ideas that really direct the improvement of Kurdish women's conditions. However, in practice there appear problems because of the Kurdish men's traditionalist and patriarchal attitudes. In fact, it is not easy to abandon their powerful position which is the accumulation of the centuries.

To illustrate, the women's experiences about the relationship between men and women within the political organizations are declared in the statements of Gülten who is categorized as a feminist woman in that way:

When women struggled for national concerns with men without gender dimension there was not a problem. However, when women start to talk about their demands they did not take any support from the men. Therefore there comes out a need to organize separately.

From this standpoint, it does not mean that women found independent organizations from the feminist point of view. That is to say, they are not totally independent from the men in their political activism. More importantly, most of them state their concern about both liberation of women and liberation of Kurds. No one takes precedence to other. On the other hand, they do not believe national liberation brings the women's liberation. Women may be gotten rid of from the oppression that is originated in their ethnic identity however the oppression and subordination positions which are result of their gender identity will continue.

In the analysis of what women get through in the engagement to the political activities these statements of the interviewees become significant. As "My political activities allowed me to go out, meet friends and educate myself", says Hasret, a woman who joined the DEHAP in mid-1990s and was active in the city. Ceylan confirms her by expressing "I established great networks with the outside world and found myself independent". "My political involvement

conferred upon me a great deal of confidence and pride in my identity”, says another woman whose name is Sultan, and who is still active in the political organizations.

These statements of women brought forward two conclusions. The first is that the nationalist movements gave women the opportunity to open up and to break from the social codes that defined their experience of family and community life. The second is that an important part of the attraction of mobilizing within the national liberation movement was that such activity represented a break with the passivity of object female status within the home and community. It provided a context that these women could become active in their own history. In short, the attraction of nationalism is that it represents an attempt to break from domination. However, by drawing in those who wish to assert liberty, it can act as a catalyst for emancipator projects that go beyond and even contradict the nationalist way of thinking.

The critics of those women’s organizations are extensions of Kurdish political organizations brought forward the necessity of to stress on the relationships between Kurdish national organizations and women’s organizations. In this occasion, Selma indicates:

The women’s organizations that are established by the women who have gained awareness of gender identity through political organizations are autonomous. Because we founded our organization in order to get rid of male domination and show ourselves to them. The conviction to be supplements of Kurdish nationalist organizations contradicts the idea that behinds to our existence. On the other hand, it is obvious that in the political sense we are together. Because, we are all the members of the Kurdish nationalist movement and additionally we share the same national concerns.

As it is concluded from the experiences of the women, they started their own political activism in the Kurdish nationalist organizations; however, in further times instead of being

members of the nationalist organizations blindly; they criticize the gender blindness of Kurdish nationalist organizations and nationalist movement.

## **ii) The Particularity of Experiences of Kurdish Women and Their Relationship with Feminism**

As it is stated, Kurdish women feminism appeared after 1980s with the effects of national movement. After participating to national movement, women have become aware of unequal relations between men and women. They could not find a place for themselves in the political organizations. Therefore, they started to establish their organizations in order to struggle against unequal gender roles. However, it does not mean that they become distant from the national movement. Mostly they have stated that national liberation and women's liberation go hand in hand besides it should be kept in mind that the issue of woman can be solved only if national liberation is realized. From this point of view, one of the respondents Reyhan who identifies herself with the feminist nationalist states:

The women who gained women consciousness during political activities in the political organizations have not been aware they acted with feminist consciousness at first. Then when they evaluate their past activities they realize they behaved in the scope of feminism. That is to say, women's usage of conceptualization of feminism was realized after mid-1990s.

The women who are interviewed to explore the critical points of Kurdish women movement are not all feminists. Besides they are different from each other in defining the understanding of feminism. These dimensions; as to be feminist, non-feminist and feminist nationalist and Kurdish feminist which I explain before are applied in order to examine specificity of their experiences. In addition, differentiation in their understanding of feminism is mostly connected with the practice of feminism in Turkey. As it has pointed out until the 1990s the

feminism has been identified with the meaning to be against men or to see men as an enemy. Especially this point of view towards feminism is displayed by the women who do not define themselves as feminist therefore they are defined as non-feminists. Also, they think feminism brings the idea of the women's superiority, which is rejected by them. As she is defined as a non-feminist Ceylan explains her attitude towards feminism in that way:

I do not agree the feminist understanding and feminist practice in Turkey which is understood only as to be anti-men instead of raising men's consciousness towards women. The feminist women's practices bring polarization between men and women. Because when one side emphasizes its superiority, other side also starts to talk about its superiority. Then it turns into a struggle for superiority.

To illustrate, the negative views of women towards feminism is mostly relate to the previous feminist practice of Turkish feminists. Another point that should be cleared is that the respondents have no sufficient information about feminism and feminist movement in Turkey.

They whether feminists or non-feminists embrace differentiated approaches in their understanding of feminism. For instance, one of the feminist nationalist women, Selma explains her understanding of feminism like that:

In my view, feminism is a lifestyle that is not only belonging to women. It is a lifestyle that all people whether they are women, men, children, elders, or homosexuals... have the secure environment to realize themselves without externalizing each other by their prejudices and to indulge freedom of each other. That is to say, feminism does not only for the women. In addition it does not demand the freedom only for women. Maybe its explicit concern can be formulated as it defends women's rights, freedom of women and it emphasizes the women issue in the male-dominated system. However, this should be realized not infringing upon the others rights.



Another point that feminist nationalists criticize is that the feminism encompasses all people without discriminating their ethnicity, religion, and language... For that reason, according to them feminism disregards ethnic emancipation of women which is seen as a deficiency of feminism. On the other hand, they state that feminism is an ideology that directs liberation of women while rejecting racism. As Gülten expresses:

Feminism is the best ideology of emancipation of women. Besides, it is concerned with oppression and subordinated position of women in order to liberate them. However, ethnic base oppression and subordination position of women is disregarded.

The criticism of feminism in terms of its disregard of ethnic oppression and subordination is made on the base of that Kurdish women are oppressed and subordinated due to their ethnic identity. That means Kurdish feminist women uttered feminism should not include only women; it also encompasses the ethnic and racial groups. That is to say it includes all the disadvantaged groups. That is the novelty of Kurdish women feminists. Further, they criticize Turkish feminists because of their disregarding ethnic based oppression and subordination of Kurdish women. As a Kurdish feminist woman Zeynep says:

Feminism is known that it is against all the forms of oppression and subordination. Feminism which is regarded as a women's movement should display an attitude on behalf of the oppressed and appositional groups.

In their practice of feminism, feminist women aim to struggle against patriarchal domination of women and to overcome oppressive relations that women encounter in order to gain the equality between men and women. The feminist woman Sultan states:

We aim to change the sexist system on behalf of women. Women face sexist behaviors in all their life- in the family, in the work place, in the street...

As it is understood; most of the respondents have the information about the history of feminist movement in Turkey. As Selma express her views on Turkish feminist movement and its effects in that way:

In fact, Turkish women movement is fortunate because it was originated from the Ottoman Empire. It has continuity with Ottoman woman movement. The important point of Ottoman woman movement is that its members were the women of aristocracy It means there were only those women were well-educated. After the establishment of Republic of Turkey woman's movement came to another stage. Women had taken many social and political rights. However, they were under the control of the State that characterized the State of feminism for them. The turning point in the history of Turkish feminism is 1980s. As I get from my readings and my experiences, the years after 1980s is the period of emergence of radical feminist movement. On this occasion, of course Kurdish women have been affected the historical processes of feminism in Turkey. In other words, the feminist experiences and practices of Turkish women had a major impact on Kurdish women in forming their feminist approaches.

To extend, feminist movement in Turkey played a significant role in emergence and development of feminist consciousness among Kurdish women. Especially Kurdish women benefited from the feminist movement in Turkey in terms of its theoretical accumulations.

However, in the evaluation of their relationship with Turkish feminist women, Kurdish women do not generally speak in favor of it. They imply that they face discriminative behaviors from Turkish feminist women. They express the biased attitude depending on nationalism of Turkish feminist women towards them. Further, the sharpness of this criticism is lessening from the non-feminist category to the feminist nationalist, to the Kurdish feminist and then to the feminist. In this context, feminist nationalist woman Hasret notes her experiences in that way:

At the time of having close contacts with Turkish feminist groups, Turkish women threat us as the women who have to be extricated because they think Kurdish women are backward and impotent. However, then when Kurdish women often appear in the feminist surroundings Turkish women become aware of the power of Kurdish women. Kurdish women have been effective both in terms of quantity and quality of their activities.

Further, the respondents indicate that in the meetings and in the feminist platforms where they met feminist Turkish women, Turkish feminist women demanded them to leave their ethnic identity. In addition, my interviewees state that Turkish women blamed them of being Kurdish nationalists and the representatives of Kurdish issue. The statements of Hasret are meaningful on this occasion:

We came together with Turkish feminist women in the actions on March 8<sup>th</sup> and May 1<sup>st</sup>. However, they wanted us not to be there with our ethnic identity, Kurdish. They do not pay attention to us. We cannot talk about our demands as Kurdish women. They behave as we did not have identity and they take the role of speaking in the name of Kurdish women. The role that is given by them to Kurdish women is to be listeners. As a result, the feeling of being externalized by them enforces us to act separately.

At the beginning especially before 1990s, Turkish feminist women put a distance between them and Kurdish women's experiences and Kurdish question in Turkey. They did not develop any sort of approach to the Kurdish question. Besides, they did not interest in oppressed and subordinated experiences of Kurdish women. The deficiency of Turkish feminist movement is not to give voice to social problems. The obvious example, they do not pay attention to the violation of Kurdish people, which shows they do not care even the human rights. This attitude of Turkish feminist women is related to not taking the risk of displaying a stand against state. That means they do not have a conscious prejudice, it is mostly connected with the social, political and historical conditions of Turkey. Therefore, as

seen above, the feminist movement in Turkey is criticized by the feminist nationalists Kurdish women hardly.

One of the feminist nationalist women, Reyhan related Turkish feminist women's insensitiveness towards Kurdish question and Kurdish women with influencing by the dominant nationalist ideology that is Kemalist ideology. She adds,

Feminist women in Turkey are nourished by the Kemalist ideology. Feminist women work within the framework of nationalist ideology. Turkish feminists have a degree of nationalist bias. They were not sensitive to the Kurdish question and Kurdish women. Moreover, they do not aware difference of Kurdish women. They assume that the common denominator as being oppressed as women is enough.

For a parallel criticism directed at Turkish feminist women, Cihan Ahmetbeyzade writes:

Their lack of interest in developing a radical political feminist movement with a commitment to problematizing the ideologies of nationalism, patriarchal discourses and practices at all levels impeded their consideration of the possibility that identities are complex. Hence, in their ideological complicity with the policies of the nation-state, Turkish feminists failed to consider the possibility that Kurdish women did not feel represented by them solely on the basis of shared gender. (Ahmetbeyzade, 2000: 198)

All the interviewees emphasize Turkish feminist women are far away to understand the conditions of Kurdish women who have different experiences. At this point, feminist nationalist woman Hasret claims:

Turkish feminist women display elitist behaviors. That is related mostly their background. Most of Turkish feminist women have good economic conditions, most of them have high education and they have small families. In contrast, most of Kurdish women live in poor conditions, they do not have education and they have crowded families in which they face unequal treatment. These differences separate Kurdish and Turkish feminist women from each other.

The quotation that is expressed by the Kurdish nationalist woman makes it clear that there is lack of understanding between Turkish feminist women and Kurdish feminist women. The criticism directed by Kurdish women towards Turkish feminist women is centered on differences, as their primary difference is their ethnic identity to be Kurdish. As it can be observed, this difference is important because it is shaping their experiences especially their womanhood experiences.

As it has been pointed out, in order to emphasize the differences all respondents express their womanhood experiences shaped by their ethnicity to be Kurd-differentiated them from their Turkish counterparts. As Zeynep states:

I am a Kurd so I have my own language that is Kurdish. In my home I speak Kurdish with my family members. However, outside home I cannot speak my mother tongue; I cannot express myself as a Kurd. It can be even dangerous to express my national identity because of the potential Turkish nationalists. On the other hand, a Turkish woman never faces that situation. That is to say, they are not faced pressure because of their national identity.

The respondents who emphasize their Kurdish identity and specificity of their culture and language stated that they have learned Turkish in primary school except one.

In contrast to other Kurdish women, the feminist woman Sultan does not see the nationalism as the primary reason behind Turkish feminist women's blindness towards Kurdish women. There are various differences that have brought out inequalities among women in Turkey. Her statements on inequalities are:

In Turkey there are different ethnic groups. As known Kurds is the largest ethnic group in Turkey whose members are mostly located in the East and South East regions. Comparing to

other regions of Turkey which are differentiated from each other in terms of economic, social and cultural aspects the regions that Kurdish people live face poor conditions. That does not mean all the rest is the same, they are also different from each other. Women are more affected from the poor conditions. Turkish feminist women and their feminism could not extend to all parts of Turkey especially poor regions. Their feminism is limited only with İstanbul and Ankara.

In compare to feminist nationalist women, the harshness of critique towards the feminist movement/women decreases in the discourse of the women in the Kurdish feminist category. There are positive expressions towards feminist movement in Turkey by the women in Kurdish feminist category in the context of their approach to Kurdish women. In this connection, one of the Kurdish feminists Hatice states,

We are not consciously excluded by Turkish feminist women instead we are not understood well by them. There are cultural differences that lead to different experiences. The relationship between wife and husband, mother and child relationships, the relationship with the state are quite different. These bring different experiences. For instance, my family live in the village and my father married three times. Now he has two wives. When I express, these make them so surprised. I face many conflicts in my life. On the other hand, in compare to other social society movements/organizations the women's groups are more concerned groups about the issue of Kurdish problem or the violation of human rights. Especially we can observe this during the organization of meetings and actions in which Kurdish women can discuss with Turkish women and they can talk about Kurds' demands. Even some women as independent women give support the Kurdish women as expressing Kurds have their own demands. So, in all the meetings those are organized by the independent women Kurdish women can speak freely even some speeches are made in Kurdish. In this respect, I think we cannot critique all the Turkish women in the same tone.

The critic that is made towards feminism in Turkey in 1980s in the case of Kurdish women insists on the incompetence of Turkish feminist movement towards Kurdish problem and the issue of Kurdish women. This critic is not only connected with its ethnic-based

externalization. In addition, the important point about feminism in 1980s is that feminist women struggled for their existence. That is to say, they carried out a struggle for survival.

In the 1990s Turkish feminist movement came to another stage in the context of Kurdish women. Turkish feminist women started to think about Kurdish women. They are more concerned about Kurdish women who have different forms of oppression and a different condition of womanhood. As one of the respondents named Reyhan tells her experiences in that way:

Turkish feminists have displayed an attitude in favor of Kurdish women in the 1990s. They have become aware of that Kurdish women have differences. We have different ethnic identity and a different language which is banned. And they have become aware of that Kurdish women faced violence and oppressive relations because of their differences.

From these expressions it has been concluded that feminism in 1990s has been exercised with its ideological standings in some account that is all people are equal without regarding their ethnic identities, race, status and class.

In addition, the effects of Kurdish women movement on Turkish feminist women/ movement convey similarities as Black feminist movement realized in the West. As Yuval-Davis states:

During the 1980s and 1990s owing to a large extent to the rise of the black feminist movement in the West which challenged the ethnocentrism, often racism, of western feminists from within, a growing sensitivity to issues of difference and the multi-positional of women has started to develop among white western feminists.(Yuval-Davis, 1997: 118)

To sum up, the feminism which concerns the emancipation of women do not bring women together as it has observed in the case of Kurdish women in Turkey. For this reason, Kurdish

women criticize the Turkish feminist movement especially before 1990s due to not regarding their differences which make them to face oppressive relations. Then the relationships between Kurdish women and Turkish feminists have been transformed after 1990s in the way of recognizing the differences. Despite overwhelming a majority of Turkish feminists' elitist attitude towards Kurdish women, Kurdish women accept that there is gradually a relative change in the attitudes of Turkish women in 1990s. There is a reflexive relationship between Turkish women and Kurdish women. That means while the attitudes of Turkish women have been changing in favor of Kurdish women, the attitudes of Kurdish women have transformed as well. One of the feminist nationalist women, Gülten expresses:

Turkish feminist women also differentiate in their ideological viewpoints as radical feminists, social feminists and Kemalist feminists. We have positive relationships with radical and socialist feminists than others. For example most of women who work at the journal of Pazartesi give support us in most of projects. We come together for common projects and we share mutually our experiences.

These expressions of Gülten imply Kurdish women have become aware of differences among Turkish women and most of Kurdish women have abandoned their totalizing prejudices towards Turkish women. Another point, that has to be underlined Kurdish women have utilized the theoretical accumulation of feminist movement in Turkey that have brought forward emergence and development of feminist consciousness among Kurdish women.



## CONCLUSION

In this study, in order to examine the political activism of Kurdish women in the 1990s in Turkey in terms of specificity of their experience related to various subjects, the male-dominated Kurdish nationalism and its relationship with awareness of gender identity of Kurdish women, the critical overview of feminism in Turkey and its relationship with Kurdish women are discussed. Via questioning the gendered Kurdish nationalism and ethnicizing the feminism in Turkey, it has become possible to figure out the specificity of experiences of Kurdish women.

As it is underlined in this study by giving attention to the difference of experiences of Kurdish women, they have faced double oppression because of being both Kurds and women. This explains their position in Kurdish culture and their oppression by the Turkish state. That means in contrast to their Turkish counterparts they are oppressed and subordinated at the same time.

It cannot be said that Kurdish women who have faced double oppression have a homogenous and unified experiences. They are differentiated in terms of language, religion/sectarian, social class, education and region. However, in this study, I stressed on the differentiation of political ideological terms that is mostly affected from their ethnicity and built up in the intersection of feminism and nationalism.

In addition to Turkish feminism, the main point that has brought forward is the political activism of Kurdish women in the 1990s along with the Kurdish nationalism. Both these

forces have affected Kurdish women in terms of emergence and development of the gender identity awareness and feminist consciousness among Kurdish women. The modernizing attempts of Kurdish nationalism and the women's participation in political organizations made a contribution to the emergence of Kurdish womanhood and feminist consciousness among Kurdish women. However, gender-blind and patriarchal nature of Kurdish nationalism has been criticized by the Kurdish women. Further, the feminist movement in Turkey which contributed to the emergence and development of feminist consciousness in Kurdish women provided a theoretical accumulation for Kurdish women.

Kurdish women movement which is considered as a new movement in some dimensions conveys some similarities to other women's movements like Turkish feminist movement. It is new because it takes a stand to its creators while nationalist project continues. It resembles other movements because it does not criticize nationalist movement in leadership level and it does not express that gender emancipation takes precedence. There is a clash between gender emancipation and ethnic emancipation in terms of taking precedence. Finally, as it is explored from the expressions of interviewees, women reach an agreement that ethnic emancipation and gender emancipation go hand in hand. Further, although Kurdish women movement is nourished from the Kurdish nationalism, it does not stop the women to criticize the nationalist movement's patriarchal standing. However, it does not mean that Kurdish feminists are completely against the nationalist movement. Additionally, another source that feeds Kurdish women movement is the feminist movement in Turkey. But, as to be critical against Kurdish nationalism, actors of Kurdish women movement criticize the Turkish feminism considering the nationalist dimensions.

As a result, the Kurdish women movement which has emerged inside Kurdish nationalist movement has had an enormous impact on the traditional feudal structures that exist in Kurdish society. In other words, women who have become political activists after their participation in political organizations and then established their organizations have gained the power to challenge the patriarchal culture imposed by their society. As a concluding sentence, it can be written that the Kurdish society has been transformed at a noteworthy level in the way of gender equality.

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