

# **Peace ever? : A Gender Perspective in Conflict Resolution**

By  
E. Yasemin Kuyucakli Ellison

*Submitted to  
Central European University  
Department of Gender Studies*

*In partial fulfillment for the degree of Masters of Arts in Gender Studies*

Supervisor: Anna Loutfi  
Second Reader: Andrea Petö

Budapest, Hungary  
2008

## **Abstract**

This research deals with the Kurdish conflict and the attempts for its resolution. In particular, it addresses the questions of the way women's organizations/politically active women participate in the process of conflict resolution and the kind of discourses Kurdish and Turkish women make use of around the issues of peace and peace-building.

I argue that the tension between Kurdish and Turkish women/feminists and the ambiguities within the peace discourse generated around the issues of nationalism, violence, militarism and patriarchy vis-à-vis the women of the two sides, prevents these women from establishing dialogue and collaborating for peace-building.

As a result, the contradictions in the way Kurdish and Turkish women treat nationalism and militarism, and the ambiguity around their significance within these concepts inhibits Turkish and Kurdish women from working in coalition for peace.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to give my special thanks to my supervisor, Anna Loutfi for her endless support and patience during this project. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to her for being such an enthusiastic, joyous and great professor throughout the year and for being such a lovely person.

I also thank my second reader, Andrea Peto for her help and encouragement to keep me working.

I especially thank Manuel Mireanu for being such a good neighbor and friend, my little women Meltem Arioglu for our chats and laughs, Hayrunnisa Goksel for her help and sincere friendship and Yesim Sunbuloglu for letting me follow her all the way from Istanbul to Budapest, for exploring the lines between sanity and insanity with me during this thesis writing period and, for being such an invaluable friend as she has always been for six years.

I would also like to express my infinite gratitude to my parents, especially my mother for the moral support, strength and endless love she has granted me all my life.

To my brother, who has always trusted in me and encouraged me for my crazy decisions in life.

To Michael Ellison, my best friend in life, for being who he is and his constant support.

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, who is the love of my life.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Methodology .....	5
Chapter 2: Historical Background.....	10
2.1 The Kurdish Question: From the Ottoman to the Turkish Republic .....	10
2.2 The Turkish Republic and the Kurds.....	14
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework.....	20
3.1 Nationalism, Feminism and Colonialism: Mapping the Tensions .....	20
3.2 Gender, Feminism and Peace-building .....	28
Chapter 4: Discourses around Peace and Peace-Building .....	32
4.1 The red lines .....	32
4.2 The ambiguities around the discourse of violence, militarism and peace .....	40
4.3 Ambiguities around the discourse of women's role and significance within national movements .....	46
Conclusions .....	52
References .....	55
Appendix.....	59
Organizations .....	59
Basak Kultur ve Sanat Vakfi.....	59
Amargi .....	59
Gokkusagi .....	60

## Introduction

Wars have been fought for different reasons in history and often feed on underlying conflicts within complex societal mechanisms. Ethnicity is one of those complicated mechanisms and ethnic conflicts are one of the most prevalent reasons that a state of peace in a country may be threatened.

The Kurdish/Turkish conflict is an example of an ongoing ethnic conflict in Turkey which has existed since the time of the Ottoman Empire. In order to overthrow the Islamic legitimacy and multi-ethnic aspect of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Republic governed by Mustafa Kemal<sup>1</sup> and the ruling elite adopted Turkish nationalism and secularism to pave its way to a modern Turkey drawing on a 'revolution from above'. This elitist revolution was authoritarian and did not reflect the political unrest and demands of the people of Anatolia<sup>2</sup>. Taspinar maintains: "Not surprisingly, the radical political project aiming at replacing Ottoman-Islamic identity with Turkish nationalism and radical secularism triggered the fiercest opposition in the Kurdish provinces, inhabited by the Republic's largest non- Turkish, Muslim minority" (2005: 45). This tension between universal and the particular has also increasingly been dominant in the contemporary Turkish politics what is at stake is secular Turkish national identity as the transmitter of cultural homogenization (Keyman 2005). Identity-oriented claims have since the 1980s generated various forms of political opposition. Turkish politics has been marked by the reemergence of Kurdish nationalism in organized form, which has put ethnicity effectively at the center and taken over almost every aspect of domestic and foreign policies of the Turkish state in the 1990s.

---

<sup>1</sup> The founder and first president of the Turkish Republic.

<sup>2</sup> There has been many debates over what is meant by Anatolia; however, the two dominant discourses are; the parts of Turkey apart from Istanbul, the parts that are referred as the East, namely the Southeast Turkey.

Recent political developments have also resulted in a bloody and violent ethnic conflict between the state and the PKK (the Kurdish Workers' Party) throughout the process of the PKK's calling for the "recognition" of difference in terms of identity politics resulting in a death-toll of over 20,000. The call for recognition through armed struggle by the PKK escalated the complexity and intensity of the issue. Keyman states: "the politics of recognition has gone hand-in-hand with violence and death, making it almost impossible to separate discursively and politically the politics of identity/recognition from the politics of war territory" (2005: 268). Perhaps it is no exaggeration to say that no conflict is more central to Turkish politics today than this one (See Taspinar 2005; Yegen 1999).

However, not much has been done to facilitate the resolution of this conflict on the state level. The meetings and talks for potential solutions were delayed, demands for democratization, restricted. The tension of the issue has also affected the people of Turkey and their wish to mobilize for possible solutions. Yet, most of the limited attempts for dialogue and peace-building between the two parties have come from civil society, especially mobilizations of women in Turkey, and feminist activists.

This study aims at scrutinizing the way women's organizations/politically active women participate in the process of conflict resolution and the discourses Kurdish and Turkish women make use of and generate around peace and peace-building. I will argue that the tension between Kurdish and Turkish women/feminisms and the ambiguity within the peace discourse generated around the issues of nationalism, violence, militarism and patriarchy vis-à-vis the women of the two sides, has inhibited the establishment of dialogue and collaboration between women for peace-building.

The notion of ‘peace-building’ will be treated in two ways within this study. One is the approaches, attempts and actions on the part of women activists to help generate possible solutions to the Kurdish/Turkish conflict and I will use the concepts ‘peace-building’ and ‘conflict resolution’ interchangeably throughout the thesis. The other is the undermining of the tension among Turkish and Kurdish women caused by the ambiguities listed above, enabling the establishment of dialogue and collaborate on the resolution of the conflict.

It is indeed remarkable that there have been many studies on the conflict itself from different points of view (Kirissi and Winrow 1997; Taspinar 2005); however, very little has been done in the way of research on the attempts, strategies or institutions of civil actors and/or the state which are aimed at resolution of the Kurdish conflict. This gap in the research may be due to the fact that the intensity of the conflict –frequently framed today as a military battle between state forces and ‘terrorist’ combatants – has seemed to cast doubt on the possibility of resolution in both state and civil sectors. I would like to contribute to addressing the gap in the existing scholarship by focusing on existing attempts, discourses and failures for conflict resolution in contemporary Turkish society. Moreover, since the gender dimension of this topic has totally been overlooked by both scholars and political actors, I would like gender dimensions of conflict resolution attempts and discourses to frame my research.

In Part One I will give an overview of the historical background in order to lay bare the Turkish and Kurdish relationships and related political developments. The first chapter of this part will focus on the events crucial to the issue from the 16. Century Ottoman Empire, to the inception of the Turkish Republic (1923). The second chapter will give an account of the issues that paved the way to the contemporary situation of the conflict.

In Part Two I will first discuss the literature and theories on nationalism, colonialism, identity politics and feminism. These will provide me with a framework to map the tensions between these concepts vis-a-vis Kurdish and Turkish women/feminists. Next, I will deal with the perspectives on peace and peace-building in order to scrutinize how Kurdish and Turkish women place and relate themselves to these concepts.

In Part Three I present the findings of my interview-based research on the peace/peace-building discourse six well-educated, middle-class Turkish and Kurdish women<sup>3</sup> make use of or generate. I explore the tension, ambiguities around this discourse and the differing perspectives the two sides have.

---

<sup>3</sup> See methodology below.



## Chapter 1: Methodology

Due to the fact that the issue of conflict resolution falls basically into the field of International Relations, feminist methodology and its application to IR is one of my basic concerns in this thesis. I take guiding principles from the works of IR theorists, who argue for methods which enable the 'visibilisation' of gender in national/international security issues/discourses: e.g. the role of women/women's organizations in shaping and contesting state institutions. Shulamit Reinharz contends that "making the invisible visible, bringing the margin to the center, rendering the trivial important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, understanding women as subjects in their own right rather than objects for men- all continue to be elements of feminist research"(1992: 133).

Unlike the mainstream IR which has asked questions about particularly powerful behavior of the states and their seeking for security; most of the IR feminists have made use of different methodological approaches in which they obtain answers to the different questions they have asked (Tickner 2005). Ann Tickner, as a feminist IR scholar also accentuates that we can not talk about a single feminist method and that "there are distinct perspectives on methodology that have emerged out of a deep skepticism about traditional knowledge, knowledge that is based largely on certain privileged men's lives and men's experiences" (2005: 28). These IR feminists seek to understand the links between the lived experiences of women and the construction and operation of economic and political power, at the state or global level and how power hierarchies affect the people at the margins of the system.

Due to the importance attached to the personal experiences, the issues of reflexivity and positionality become crucial for the research. Cook and Fonow (1990) advocate a research in which both the researcher and the researched participate dialectically. Reinharz rejects the claims to neutrality and endorses what he refers to as a “reflexive attitude”. In this respect, one’s personal position becomes crucial and feminist researchers see this position “as a necessary explanation of the researcher’s standpoint that serves to strengthen the standards of objectivity, resulting in “strong objectivity” or “robust reflexivity” (Reinharz 1992: 140). Donna Haraway argues that, politics and epistemology of location is based on situating, location, and positioning, ‘where partiality and not universality’ is the source of knowledge production. Gender, class, race and nationality of the researcher are the “situated knowledges”. These “situated knowledges”, in turn, give room for multiplicity of viewpoints (1991).

In the issue of giving voice to women’s experience, Jamie Gorelick considers the research as a chorus of voices “with an embedded contrapuntal duet” (1991: 5). However, giving voice to experience should be problematized because we do not have direct access to another’s experience and this process involves representing reality and by doing that “we create and recreate voices over and over again during the research process” (Riessman 1987: 16)

In the light of the concepts mentioned above I will make a brief overview and discussion of my research in terms of the location of the researcher and the research subject. The gender aspect of the issue of conflict resolution has long been overlooked in the knowledge- building process of Turkish academia. Thus, I believe my research scrutinizing Turkish and Kurdish women’s participation in the conflict resolution process will serve as an important step in the “visibilization” of gender.

I situate myself as a middle- class, well- educated, urban Turkish woman as a researcher and my interviewees are both Turkish and Kurdish, mostly well-educated/intellectual and middle-class, urban women. The basic difference between me and my Kurdish interviewees is an ethnic difference. In this respect, the issue of being an insider or outsider becomes prominent. While some scholars argue that insiders acknowledge the internal dynamics and complexities better, are more sensitive to community's sensitivities and are trusted more by those they study, some accentuate the shifting and flexible status of the outsider/insider. As I have mentioned above, I am an outsider to the women who are Kurdish. However, this aspect did not cause a problem because both our class-education commonalities and my sensitivity to Kurdish- Turkish conflict and its resolution helped me approach the status of an insider.

In order to explore my research questions, I have used a case study as a way of doing qualitative research (Stake 2003). My case study samples are NGO-type women's organizations: *Amargi*, *Gökkuşağı* (Rainbow) and *Başak Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı* (Başak Culture& Art Formation)<sup>4</sup>. Since there are no NGOs dealing with the issues of conflict resolution *per se*, *Amargi*, *Gökkuşağı* and *Basak Kültür Sanat Vakfı* were chosen for the fact that they have peace-building projects on their agenda. I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with six women Pınar Selek, Nil Mutluer, Rahime Özatikdi, Zehra İpek, Hümeysra Tusun, Sahhanım Kanat; from these organizations, the first two of whom are Turkish and four are Kurdish. The women I interviewed are well educated or intellectual Kurdish and Turkish women. The age of my interviewees ranged between 30-40. I asked open-ended questions and recorded five of them and took extensive notes on one. I also transcribed those five in Turkish. I asked all my interviewees the same questions and interviewed them separately.

---

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix.

For ethical considerations, I provided them with the information about the scope of my research, my aim to do it and for what purposes it would be used in order to receive their consent to participate in it. My interviewees did not have any concerns about confidentiality and allowed me use their real names.

In terms of sample selection, I used non probability, snowball samples. The reason I made use of this kind of sampling is that I used my connection with one of the writers and employees of *Amargi* I have already met during a conference on conflict resolution last year in order to get in touch with the other women that I would like to interview. I had anticipated that during the interviews I might have come across potential problems and questions. One of the obstacles I had anticipated was that most of the women I interviewed would be very well educated and/or intellectuals. Therefore I “humbly present[ed] myself as a learner” (Fontana & Frey 2003: 59) and I made sure that my aim as an academic researcher was not to judge their approaches or strategies.

I gathered my empirical data via personal narratives and drawn on narrative analysis in the research process. I find this methodological approach appropriate for my research because it grants prominence to human agency and imagination, and is fits well into the studies of subjectivity and identity (Riessman 1987). I also am interested in the role of human agency in the way stories are constructed. Although the focus in my research is not personal stories of past events, as Kathy Reissman points out that research interviews can be considered the same way in the sense that respondents will “hold the floor for lengthy turns and sometimes organize replies into long stories” (1987: 17). In terms of analysis of my data, I will probably use William Labov’s (1972) method of transcription and his structural categories. My aim here is to focus on the core narrative. In this method utterances are divided into clauses, lines

are numbered and the function identifies the parts of the narrative. However, I am not only interested in the content or the plot of the narrative but also how the story is told.

After transcribing my interview material, I chose the parts that were relevant to the scope of my argument. I divided these parts into smaller categories in order to place them in my chapters. I also mostly used direct, block quotes to emphasize the points I wanted to make. As Alessandro Portelli maintains; oral sources are “artificial, variable, and partial.” (1998: 70) Thus, the first hand information I received from my interviewees for its partiality does not have a claim of objectivity.

After presenting the methodology I drew on for the data analysis of my interviews, below shall I give a brief account of the key historical events of the Kurdish/Turkish conflict in order to be able to make more sense of the data I have collected through interviews with Kurdish and Turkish women.

## Chapter 2: Historical Background

### *2.1 The Kurdish Question: From the Ottoman to the Turkish Republic*

The integration of the Kurds in the Southeast Anatolia under Ottoman rule has been both through attempts of a religious and political leader<sup>5</sup> and the consent of the Kurdish tribes in the region.

The Safevi<sup>6</sup> attacks towards the Ottoman Empire during Sultan Yavuz Selim period was one of the most crucial dangers to Kurdish tribes. Selim defeated the army of Sah Ismail in the Caldiran war in 1514 and the Sunni Kurds and Turkman tribe leaders who had been distracted by Safevis various times supported the Ottoman army actively during this war (Akyol 2007). The Kurdish tribe leaders in the region came together and decided to join the Ottomans due to constant Safavid threat. After the participation of the Southeast in the Ottoman Empire, Kurdish tribes and their leaders were granted autonomy. Eleven flags were granted to the Turkish officers and eight flags were granted to the Kurdish officers under the establishment of 'the Province of Diyarbakır' (Akyol 2007). Moreover, five Kurdish dynasties retained their status in an administration passing from the father to the son.

The Kurds led their life under this regulation in the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman rule granted them the possibility to retain their identity under a legal order that facilitated the continuation of the feudal order. No significant ethnic conflict or controversy was experienced within this structure. Moreover, until the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, one finds very little evidence of Kurdish

---

<sup>5</sup> Bitlisli Idris (Idris from Bitlis) was a prominent religious leader who helped the Kurdish land be a part of the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>6</sup> The Safavids are the establishers of the Great Iranian Empire with a dynasty of Kurdish, Azeri and Persian ethnicities.

nationalism<sup>7</sup> within the empire, since ethnic identity was not considered an aspect of affiliation to the Ottoman Empire. Kemal Kirisci and Gareth M. Winrow (1998: 23) maintain:

The Arabs, Albanians, Turks and etc. in the Ottoman Empire were not aware of their ethnic identities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, Kurds did not have ethnic consciousness. The people of the Ottoman Empire defined itself through religious basis.

Rebellions<sup>8</sup> starting from 1840s were not based on ethnicity, but have developed as reactions against the *Tanzimat Reforms*.<sup>9</sup> The Ottoman Empire aimed at the centralization of the regions that had been granted a broad autonomy through reforms in order to facilitate control. As a consequence, *Tanzimat* was not a success and the centralization could not be implemented. The tribal structure of the Kurds could not be affected through these reforms due to their resistance. Both the weakening of the empire against industrialized Europe and the strengthening of the nationalism trends among the minorities shattered the unity of the empire (Akyol 2007). The Ottoman intellectuals encountered three kinds of politics in their quest for resolution.

One of them was the politics of *Tanzimat*, which encompassed preserving the Christians as subjects of the empire. A second was the idea that the Muslim community of the empire should be protected. This was Abdulhamid II.'s politics of 'Islamism'. The last one was Turkism, which nurtured a consciousness and politics of Turkishness. However, the Community of Unity and Progress (*İttiat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*) facilitated the establishment of the Second Constitutional Era (*II. Meşrutiyet*) under the idea of 'Ottomanism' in 1908, in which the aim was to consolidate the non-Muslims and the non-Turk Muslims under the roof

---

<sup>7</sup> Nationalism is an ideology of the modern times. People did not see themselves as the individuals of a nation, they saw themselves as the people of the political or religious authority they were affiliated with (Akyol 2007).

<sup>8</sup> The Sheikh Ubeydullah Rebellion in 1870, Yezdan Şer Rebellion in 1855.

<sup>9</sup> A number of reforms during 1839 and 1856, aiming at change in the social, political, cultural, and economic spheres within the Ottoman Empire. This period is also considered to be a bridge between the Ottoman and the modern Turkish Republic in terms of establishing the foundations of modernization and laicization.

of Ottoman citizenship (Akyol 2007). However, the rebellion of Macedonian and Albanian Muslims against the Ottoman in 1912 and the separation of the non-Muslims strengthened the tendency towards ‘Turkism’. Signs of Kurdish nationalism<sup>10</sup> can be seen during this period; however, a great deal of Kurds remained loyal to the empire due to their religious affiliation. This loyalty was especially significant during war years between 1912 and 1918 because the Kurds participated in the Ottoman army and fought in Trablusgarb, Yemen, Balkan wars and World War I. During the War of Independence between 1919 and 1922, a resistance movement had been mobilized and Mustafa Kemal, emphasizing the motive of independence from the foreign enemies and the common identity - Islam- encouraged the participation of Kurds in his army (Taspinar 2005). Since the Ottoman Empire was disintegrating, the need for a new order emerged.

The first article of Law on Fundamental Organization adopted in January 1921 declared that ‘sovereignty, without any preconditions, belonged to the nation’ (Kirişçi 1998). This was a major shift from the Ottoman conception of government whose basis was the divine authority of the Sultan/Caliph and article 3 also declared the assembly as the governing body of the ‘state of Turkey’ (Akyol 2007). These references to ‘the nation’ and to ‘Turkey’ was a way to mention ‘the nation of Turkey’, however it was never entirely clear and it could still have been considered to refer to a national identity consisted of the Islamic groups of different ethnic backgrounds in Turkey, including the Kurds. However, in a speech Mustafa Kemal gave in October 1922, he stated that “until three-and-a-half years ago we were living as a religious community...Since then we are living as a Turkish nation”, emphasizing the fact that the terms ‘Turk’ and ‘Turkish’ were gaining new meaning” (Kirişçi 1998). There was a deliberate tendency to dissociate ‘Turkishness’ from its previous connotation of the traditional

---

<sup>10</sup> See 2.2.



idea of 'nation' pertaining to Islam and the Ottoman Empire. Thus, 'Turkishness' would become the foundation of a new national identity that would be required to facilitate the transition from a traditional society to a modern one.

## **2.2 The Turkish Republic and the Kurds**

The Turkish Republic was founded by Mustafa Kemal in October 1923 and the Office of the Caliphate was abolished in March 1924<sup>11</sup>. Akyol claims that it is not that easy to talk about a concrete Kurdish problem until 1925 when the young Turkish Republic was shaken by Sheikh Said rebellion (2007: 101). The rebellion was quelled by the Turkish Republic; however a 'Pandora's Box' had been opened. Metin Toker contends that this rebellion was one of the turning points of the Republic since it triggered the Kurdish nationalism which had been weak until then and enabled the radicalization of the revolutionary aspect of the young Turkish Republic (1968:7). There were also other rebellion between 1925 and 1938 against the tendency towards the assimilation of the Kurdish population by the dominant Turkish ethnic population. Based on the Law on Fundamental Organization of 1921, a definite attempt was made for the first time in the new March 1924 constitution to define the term 'Turk'. According to Article 88 of the Constitution 'the people of Turkey regardless of their religion and race were, in terms of their citizenship, to be Turkish'(Kirişçi 1998) . However, this article caused a heated debate due to the wording not emphasizing citizenship, but basically calling the people of Turkey Turkish regardless of their religion and race.

Mustafa Kemal actually did not consider ethnicity and race to be the elements of a nation, however he emphasized the will to live together to be constituent element of a nation. Yegen argues that the Turkish state 'assumed' that there was not any Kurdish element on Turkish territory from the mid-1920s until the end of the 1980s, referring to it as the silence of the Turkish state to the 'Kurdishness' of the Kurdish question (1999:216) . He further argues that there is a direct relationship between the emergence of the Kurdish question and the modernization project which involves centralization, nationalization and secularization. Thus,

---

<sup>11</sup> The same year the Law on the Unification of Education was also adopted.

the Kurdish question should be scrutinized through the centralization project of Mahmut II, the reformation projects of the Young Turks<sup>12</sup> and Republicans and the social developments after the military coups of 1960 and 1980, which are considered to be the dramatic breaks in the modernization project of Turkey. The military coup in 1960 praised the concept of 'revolution' and the liberal nature of 1961 Constitution facilitated the development of the leftist notions and created a liberal environment (Van Bruinessen 1989). Kurdish intellectuals also began to organize and participate in the political activities. The Turkish left prepared the basis for the development of ethnic Kurdish nationalism; however they separated and established their own communist and socialist nationalist organizations the most important of which was the Revolutionary Cultural Society of the East (*Devrimci Doğu Ocakları*) established in 1969 (Akyol 2007). Abdullah Öcalan<sup>13</sup> also worked for this organization. They placed emphasis on the kind of revolutionary politics against tribal, traditional and religious themes. The members of the organization were arrested, judged, and imprisoned during the military coup of March 1971. Their claim was that capitalist and imperialist policies had resulted in lack of economic development in eastern Anatolia and the denial of Kurdish identity (Kirişçi 1998).

First there was solidarity between the Kurdish and Turkish revolutionaries due to their common Marxist cause. However, after the general amnesty in the mid-1970s with the re-emergence of radical organizations, it was clear that the coalition between the Kurdish and Turkish leftists had lost its strength. While Turkish leftists claimed that the cultural and economic liberation of the Kurds would be through the help of the Turkish proletariat, Kurdish leftists emphasized the recognition of Kurds as a separate nation, able to lead a proletarian revolution of their own (Kirişçi 1998). The number of organizations with Marxist-

---

<sup>12</sup> A group of revolutionist young Turks who had the the Second Constitutional Era start.

<sup>13</sup> The founder of the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK).

Leninist approach increased after this separation. The PKK, founded on 27 November 1978, whose leader was Ocalan, was one of the most radical and influential organizations. His claim was that the area in which the Kurds lived the most was the colony of Turkey, and he accused the Kurdish feudalists and bourgeois for cooperating with the Turkish ruling classes to exploit Kurdish peasants and the proletariat (Kirişçi 1998). Starting a small-scale guerilla war in a small town in the Southeast of Turkey, he called for the establishment of a Marxist- Leninist Kurdistan. However, he had to flee abroad as a consequence of the military coup in 1980 and cease the activities of the PKK. The military organization re-started its violent acts, which would play a crucial role in bringing the Kurdish question to the center of Turkish politics in 1984. The military coup's aim was to reintroduce what they considered as strict Kemalist policies. The political discourse stemming from these policies definitely emphasized the unity of the nation, its territorial integrity and 'Turkishness of Turkey'. The strict environment can be traced in the incident of the imprisonment of a former CHP (The Republican People's Party) deputy for having stated that "There are Kurds in Turkey. I am a Kurd" (Kirişçi 1998). The new Constitution of 1982 also mirrored the strict reactions against manifestations of the Kurdish identity. Turkish democracy and its crisis vis-à-vis the Kurdish/Turkish conflict can be traced down in important Turkish laws. According to the article 39 of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, respect to the language rights was applied only to 'non-Moslem minorities, i.e., principally to the Greeks, Armenians and Jews, and there was not any assurance for any 'Moslem minority' in the new Turkish Republic (Dodd 1983). The policy of the Turkish government for minorities based on the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne assumed that religious minorities exists in Turkey, however there are no ethnic or national minorities. In this respect, another assumption was that since all citizens in Turkey benefit equal rights, except for the additional rights enjoyed by the religious minorities, there is no need for additional rights for others.

According to the 1982 Turkish Constitution, which is the latest constitution of the country, the Turkish state is an indivisible entity with its territory and nation whose language is Turkish (Article 3). Article 14 prohibits activities which violate the ‘indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation’ (Dodd 1983). Article 68 states that the statutes and programs of political parties should not be in conflict with the indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation (Dodd 1983). Thus, a political party based on merely Kurdish identity is likely to be banned. Besides the ban for Kurdish parties, expression of any idea that would refer to the recognition of Kurdish identity was prohibited. Using Kurdish was forbidden and considered a crime through a law passed in 1983. Although the prohibition towards speaking, publishing and broadcasting in Kurdish is abolished in 1991, the prohibition towards establishing parties based on Kurdish identity and using a language other than Turkish is maintained. Many newspapers and journals were banned for making ‘Kurdism’ propaganda and HEP (The Labor Party of the Public) was also banned for the same reason. The parties founded after them encountered the same kind of treatment (Çağlayan 2007). On this ground, it can be argued that the legal structures and political institutions after September 12 have appropriated the denial of Kurdish ethnicity and cultural identity. As a consequence of the military repression, the rise of Kurdish was experienced.

The PKK decided to intensify military operations and political activity in the urban areas in 1986 and various violent acts such as; kidnapping tourists, hostage-taking and bombing. The same year the government introduced the village guard system in which loyal Kurdish people were armed. Meanwhile, the PKK was referred to as a ‘separatist terrorist organization’ without mentioning the ethnic aspect (Taspınar 2005). The 1988 refugee crisis was the incident through which the ethnic dimension of the Kurdish issue was stated (Taspınar 2005).

However, by 1990, about 250.000 armies were fighting the PKK guerillas and the death toll was about 2500 and the violence even intensified in 1994. The PKK also attacked the civilian targets to intimidate and enable them to be submissive towards the organization (Kirişçi 1998). The PKK activities were considerably diminished by the Turkish military in 1995. Meanwhile, PKK's violence was directed towards the schools because the PKK believed that Turkish education system was aiming at assimilating the Kurds. Many villages were forcibly evacuated and thousands of people were displaced during 1994 and 1995 due to the attacks (Taşpınar 2005). Ocalan was caught in Kenya in 1999 and brought to Turkey. He maintained that he now rejected the ideas he had endorsed before such as the idea that Turkey was a colonizer state and the Kurds were having a war of independence against this colonization. He also claimed that he no longer endorsed the idea of a separate state or federation and, a democratic republic enabling the attainment of language and cultural rights would be the only demand of the Kurds. He also apologized to the mothers of the martyrs for the death of their sons and daughters (Akyol 2006). Ocalan also asked for the deportation of the organization members. The AKP (The Justice and Development Party) government, which came to power in 2002, following the steps to be taken for the EU process, lifted the ban towards education in Kurdish and broadcasting. Even TRT (Turkish Radio Television) took an unimaginable step and started broadcasting in Kurdish. Unfortunately, the cease fire period lasted five years and the PKK started its violent acts in 2005. The armed conflict between the state forces and the PKK members has been going on even today. Turkish army has also been launching air strikes against the targets of the PKK in Northern Iraq since December 2007, which has merely exacerbated the conflict.

As I pointed out above, the agenda of Kurdish/Turkish conflict is dominated by the issues around Turkish and Kurdish nationalism. Moreover, one can easily say that nationalism is a contested concept and can be considered one of the causes of the tension nationally and

internationally. Women, as the members of a nation have also taken their share of the contestations over and within nationalism because they have always been crucial actors and subjects of nation-building processes and national movements. In the next chapter I will give an account of the debates around nationalism, colonialism and women's role and significance within these issues.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

### ***3.1 Nationalism, Feminism and Colonialism: Mapping the Tensions***

In this chapter I will discuss the themes that generate tension within the discourse of feminism, nationalism and colonialism in relation to the perspectives about peace and peace-building. I will start with an overview of the debates around the way women relate themselves to the nation-building processes and anti-colonialist projects and identity politics in order to point out the conflicts within this discourse. The second part of the chapter will focus on the different perceptions of peace and the perspectives on women's role in peace-building and establishing dialogue.

Gender dimensions of the nationalism discourse; that is, the relationship between the national project and the sexual project has been overlooked for many years prior to the beginning of 1980s, when new approaches to nation, nationalism, and the nation-state began to emerge. While scholars such as and Gellner.(See Anderson 1983; Gellner 1998) published books critically analyzing the previous approaches to these concepts, on the other hand, feminist scholars, especially the feminists from “the third world” countries, have begun to write about the national projects and nation-building processes in the postcolonial context and women's place within them (See Jayawerdana 1986; Yuval-Davis 1989).

I will also make use of theories and literature about nationalism and colonialism vis-à-vis gender in my thesis because I believe that scrutinizing the relationship between nationalism and gender grants me a crucial tool to analyze the patterns of ethnic conflicts, attempts for resolution and the discourses women generate for peace. Before the analysis of my data, I will review the literature for the concepts I have introduced.



Historically, there has been a tension and ambiguity between feminism and nationalism. Women have been expected to choose between feminism and nationalism within most of nationalist movements because nationalism has been privileged over gender concerns and it has forced women to postpone their demands until after national independence. Some Kurdish women's submission to the national struggle to the extent that they totally ignore domestic violence mirrors this attitude. Chandra T. Mohanty (1988) emphasizes the fact that women living under colonial domination can not ignore colonial state hegemonies manipulating the political and social inequalities of women as well as men. Thus, the notion of agency in Third World feminisms operates through opposition to colonial structures rather than the logic of gender identification. Kumari Jayawardena accentuates women's relation to the nationalist projects in terms of their power to challenge these projects and their demands within them. Making use of the cases such as Egypt, Iran, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Sri-Lanka, Korea, she argues that there were feminist components pushing for the liberation of women in the women's movement of these countries vis-à-vis anti-imperialist and nationalist movements (Jayawardana 1986).

Although during Palestinian women's participation in the nationalist movement from 1920s, up until the intifada of the late 1980s and early 1990s, nationalism was considered to have a 'releasing effect' on women for opening up a space for the involvement of women in the public sphere and women expressed their concerns about the divisive role of seeking for gender equality when the nation as a whole was colonized and under attack, a critique of the tensions were initiated in the 1980s (Woodsmall 1936:363).

Margot Badran (1988), while granting examples of countries such as Egypt and Iran as the cases in which women fought both for their feminist and national demands and generated constructs of nationalism in which the liberation of women was embedded, defines this either/or choice as a patriarchal pattern that places a nationalist/patriotic burden on women. On the other hand, this patriarchal burden can be reversed as in the case of the burden put on Third World women by First World feminisms, in which women have been expected to defer and overlook their anti-imperialist, nationalist demands for the sake of feminism and the experiences of Western women have been universalized to be the representative of all women.. In this respect, patriarchy should be analyzed vis-à-vis other dominating systems and nationalist and imperialist patterns within feminism should be scrutinized as well as the patriarchal connotations within imperialism and nationalism.

When feminism privileges the interests of the women in the imperialist countries over the local interests of women, borrowing from patriarchal privilege, it becomes imperialist (McClintock 1997). Anne McClintock's evaluation will be useful for me when I point out the different agenda's of Turkish and Kurdish women in relation the concerns they prioritize. Mohanty (1988) scrutinizes the notion of 'Third World difference,' a monolithic conception of a 'Third World' which is stable, ahistorical and oppressive to all women in these countries. A majority of Western feminist theories consider these women as 'traditional' and in need of an education in Western feminism; thus, they are constructed as dependants and Western feminisms appropriate and "colonize" this Third World difference overlooking the complexities in the lives of these women. I will specifically draw on the discourse of the Third World feminists in my thesis because although Kurds have not been colonized in the sense of colonization of the land, their statelessness and the controlling, manipulating and

homogenizing policies of the state such as birth control and language policies<sup>14</sup> have been defined as ‘colonizing’ in Kurdish nationalist discourse. In this respect, analysis of the intersection between nationalism, feminism and colonialism provides a relevant framework for my research.

However, Ellen Fleischmann, drawing on Karen Offen’s modes of feminism one of which is ‘relational feminism’<sup>15</sup> emphasizes the commonalities between the Third world feminisms and Western feminisms (Fleischmann 2003). She finds the aspects underlying relational feminism appropriate for societies that emphasize the significance of collective good rather than individual good and maintains that relational feminism strengthens the patriarchal structures of family and differences in gender roles in society.

In terms of the patriarchal aspect of nationalism, Cynthia Enloe (1990) maintains that militarism and nationalism have arisen from a masculinized memory and masculinized hopes. Relational feminism does not question these structures and the communal solidarity and (Palestinian) nationalism uses cultural concepts such as traditions in the official discourse as a means for reinforcing and maintaining national unity (Fleischmann 2003). In addition, according to Peteet (1993:53) the values of the community are converted into “a culture of [nationalist] resistance” through the help of women as ‘bearers of collectives’ (Yuval-Davis 1997). Both Offen’s concept of ‘relational feminism’ and Enloe’s perception of the relationship between militarism and masculinity will help me explain Kurdish women’s consent to participate in the armed conflict as a guerilla and hopes for the future of the struggle.

---

<sup>14</sup> See chapter II.

<sup>15</sup> A mode of feminism that emphasizes communal good rather the good of the individual.

Fleischmann (2003) also points out to the double task women fulfill when she elaborates on the common features of patriarchal nationalism national/ist feminism that favor ‘nationalist woman’ who is “both ‘traditional’ and ‘new woman,’ mother and fighter, for example”. According to Fleischmann, patriarchal nationalism also altered the meaning of women in the domestic sphere by politicizing it. In the colonial context, Partha Chatterjee emphasizes the separation of the social space into ‘the home’ and ‘the world’ and domestication of woman in ‘the home’ (1993: 7). It was crucial in the national struggle to retain and strengthen the inner values of the national culture and this was women’s mission within the framework of anti-colonial Indian nationalism. Thus, a ‘new patriarchy’ in which ‘female emancipation’ is intertwined with the goal of an independent nation emerged and introduced a new subordination of women (Fleischmann 2003).

Mapping the tensions between feminism, nationalism and colonialism also require a brief scrutiny into the debates over identity politics due to its relevance to my research and the concerns they share.

Political movements based on claims about the injustices applied to particular social groups emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. These movements focused on the notion that some social groups are oppressed. Iris Marion Young argues that one’s identity as a Native American or woman, for example, makes one vulnerable to violence, cultural imperialism such as overlooking one’s group identity, stereotyping or marginalization (Young 1990). On the contrary, Judith Butler (1999), criticizing the construction of femininity so deeply imbued with oppression, points out to the fact that such attempts will lead to reinforcing the very discourse they seek to undermine. This perspective can also be seen in the case of perceptions towards racial and ethnic group identities. As I discussed above in its relation to my research, the universalizing tendency of the Western feminism fails to

recognize the specificity of its own constituency and constructs the Third world women as the oppressed and victims rather than understanding their distinctive situation.

On the other hand, as in the case of Kurdish women and Turkish women, the perception of identity politics as (with reference to Shulamith Firestone) ‘women’s oppression as women’ – not diluted with other issues of identity- generates tension between feminists and women identifying themselves with their ethnic identity (1970: 44). Elizabeth V. Spelman (1988) opposes this view of defining the subject as presenting a single axis of identity. Thus, she argues that identity politics requires action around a single axis, putting pressure on the members of the group to identify with that single axis as a determiner of their identity when they may perceive themselves as whole selves who cannot be presented so reductively (Spelman 1998).

On this ground, the notion of identity based on the experience of the subject becomes crucial. Thus, identity politics as politics drawing on shared experiences of individuals, as can be seen in the diverse experiences of Kurdish women in terms of the effects of war, becomes problematic since it rests on unifying claims of diverse individuals as one. Another important point comes from Sonia Kruks (2000) in which she argues that “an epistemology of provenance” will become the norm, which means the legitimization of political views through their articulation by subjects as particular experiences. This attitude does not allow critique of these perspectives by those who do not share the experience and consequently closes off chances for dialogue and coalition-building. Other scholars propose alternative models for feminist theory in which the emphasis on shared criteria of participation in a social group can be minimized and instead the alliances can be created around non-identical connections (Cornell 2000; Heyes 2000).

William Connolly touches a crucial point that applies to my treatment of identity in the analysis of my interviews with Kurdish and Turkish women. He argues that identity needs differences to secure its certainty and it converts these differences into otherness (Connolly 2002). Identity politics, on this ground reifies this Otherness and prevents the attempts of getting in touch with one another, among groups or collaborate for common aims. Wendy Brown (1995) also maintains: “Politicized identity enunciates itself, makes claims for itself, only by entrenching, restating, dramatizing, and inscribing its politics; it can hold out no future –for itself or others- that triumphs over this pain”.

Young, on the other hand, present the idea of politics of difference that endorses attachment to ethnic practices, language and other cultural forms as an important characteristic of social existence because she claims that ignoring differences undermines groups with different experiences and culture than the privileged groups and lets the privileged groups ignore their own group specificity (Young 1990). Groups propounding the positivity of group difference create a domain in which the meaning of difference becomes a means of political struggle and assign an emancipatory meaning of difference to change the exclusionary meaning.

Susan Bickford participates in the discussion by defending identity politics. She maintains that mobilizing a relevant group identity is a way to challenge the oppressive and constraining form of power. She emphasizes the importance of identity and identity politics as a political claim against oppression because identity itself manifests a different kind of power which is empowering and enabling (Bickford 1997). Our race, ethnic and gender identities may be a crucial motivation for political struggle and action, she states.

Debates around nationalism, colonialism and identity politics grant us a general picture of the themes generating tension and the way women relate themselves to this tension. How about the way women relate themselves to peace? The way they relate to each other to work for peace? In the next chapter, I will give an account of the literature dealing with these issues to provide tools for my research.

### **3.2 Gender, Feminism and Peace-building**

The realization of the relevance of gender issues to IR has grown especially with the end of the Cold War, as IR began to scrutinize closely conflict resolution and peace-building (Tickner 2001). Apart from the realm of IR the gendered aspect of wars and peace has been a contested issue overall in academia. Caroline Sweetman (2004) contends that evaluating war and peace via the lens of gender analysis enables us to realize gender stereotypes and the way they perpetuate conflict and inequality.

Some scholars have argued that women should be considered inherently peaceful since they are hardly responsible for decisions of war and it is the concept of motherhood used to legitimize the claim ( Skjelbaesk& Smith 2001) Women are depicted as “ powerless victims, or as earth mothers promoting peace” (Sweetman 2004: 2). Certain radical feminists such as Gisela Kaplan have suggested that women have a special affinity with peace. Moreover, as some of the Kurdish women claim in my analysis, most of women peace activists have drawn on maternal imagery to convey their message since “many women in these movements see themselves as different from men” (Tickner 2001). Ruddick emphasizes the relationship between politics of peace with mothering without claiming that women are more peaceful than men (1993). However, according to Tickner, despite the fact that peace movements making use of maternal images have had some achievements, they do not do anything to challenge existing gender relations. On the contrary, this approach enables men to manipulate the agenda of world politics and marginalize women’s voices in foreign policymaking issues.

In fact, women possess different interests and do not necessarily bear one voice on issues of war and peace. These interests are not only gender ones, but also interests of their political



identities such as nationality, ethnicity and others such as their class, religion, age, and so on (El-Bushra 2007). Thus, the conceptualization of women as ‘victims’ or inherently ‘peaceful’ needs to be questioned on several grounds since there is substantial amount of literature citing that women often support war, participate in armed conflicts as guerillas, soldiers or in nationalist political movements.<sup>16</sup>.

According to Pinar Selek, the reason for women’s participation in the peace-building struggles is not due to their “loving and passive natures”, it is due to their political choice. The essentialist gendered assumption she remarks: “reinforces the theories that reduce war to the essentialist structures and thus legitimize it” (2007: 28). Judy El-Bushra (2007) accentuates the point that essentializing women’s roles is not only unrealistic but also causes us to overlook the injustice of women’s exclusion from decision- making mechanisms and active players’ world. In this respect, both feminists and conflict resolution perspectives foreground the issues of inclusion and exclusion.

Julie Cupples maintains that women’s only role is not only that of wife or motherhood, they can potentially take other decisions in terms of social roles such as privileging their ethnic, religious or national identity at specific moments (2004). She goes on to argue that women’s differences between them - which often lead to political and economic inequalities- may challenge their wish for peace and be very difficult to overcome. As in the case of the poor Kurdish women in my analysis, economic inconsistencies generate different daily concerns for those who experience them and keep them struggling with their own reality. In this regard, since feminism and conflict resolution strategies look more closely into the power inequalities

---

<sup>16</sup> Cynthia Enloe 1990 *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*; Pinar Selek 2004. *Barisamadik* (We could not make peace).

and all its manifestations and they deliver the idea that unless we change the way we constitute gender identities, we can not change how we construct ethno-national identities. El-Bushra accordingly emphasizes the fact that men and women are each differently violated by war and women's own experiences in and after it brings many women from different, even conflicting ethnic and national identities into the projects of peace and enable them to collaborate for prevention and resolution of conflicts (2007).

Cynthia Cockburn also, informs us from her research with Israeli, Palestinian, Northern Ireland and Bosnian women that women create networks for solidarity with other women and come together to protest violence both within home and outside it (1998). Donna Haraway is the one of the most prominent scholars who has written tremendous work on the ways of "allowing heterogeneous actors to work productively together" (Bastian 2006: 1044). In her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto", Haraway emphasizes the importance of rethinking the dichotomous thinking of the conventional Western world and rejecting the homogenous unity within groups in order to be able to act collectively (Haraway 2003). She developed her figuration of the cyborg, against the homogenizing sisterhood and recognizing the multiple forms of domination affecting women in different ways. According to Michelle Bastian, a reconstructed feminist theory of coalition should seek to find "possibilities of grounding political work in something other than unity" (p.1033). Such an approach brings together the will to getting in touch with others across categories, not by trying to change them but by acknowledging the fact that our understanding of ourselves and others do not need to be "static to be specific" (p.1035). In this respect, Haraway maintains that conflicting identities should be seen as enriching factors for a more fruitful and inclusive politics and coalition. Linnell Secomb also maintains that a society is best understood "as productive disagreement" (2000: 134).

Nira Yuval-Davis also elaborates on the issues of identity and women's activism, drawing on the practice known as 'transversalism,' which is different from a 'universalism', that is homogenizing and exclusionary (1994). For a productive coalition, she argues, what matters is "what we want to achieve" not "who we are" (1994). However, this does not mean that we should overlook our identities, but instead challenge the fixed notion of identity taking into consideration different experiences.

Selek, convincingly argues that peace movements are doomed to fail unless the patriarchal system is analyzed and the reasons why military aspects take over social life increasingly. She remarks "we need feminism to overcome war" and goes on to elaborate that feminist analysis is an important departure point that enables us to realize the relation between patriarchy, nation and militarism and perceive violence as a whole (2007).

## Chapter 4: Discourses around Peace and Peace-Building

### 4.1 *The red lines*

There should not be any reason to stop people who start off for peace. However, we come to a certain extent and then do not go further, we stop there. Identity politics and Kurdish and Turkish nationalities feeding from them are the RED LINES that keep women away from each other (Nil Mutluer).

In this chapter, I will give an account of the debates over; nationalism and identity politics causing disagreements among Kurdish and Turkish women. I will argue that the tension between Turkish and Kurdish feminists and the differing discourses among Kurdish women around the issues I mentioned above prevent these women from collaboration for the resolution of the conflict. My arguments are based on narrative analysis of primary data based on my interviews with six Turkish and Kurdish women; Pinar, Nil, Rahime, Zehra, Hümeýra , Sahhanım who are members of three different NGOs.

Criticism by Kurdish feminists of Turkish feminists mirrors the criticisms by Third World feminists of Western feminists that received widespread attention in the 1980s and 1990s<sup>17</sup>. These criticisms generally target the Turkish oriented independent women's movement and the approaches of Turkish feminists in their attempts to work together with Kurdish women's organizations.

First of all, Kurdish women find the perception of themselves as 'Third World women' in the sense understood by Mohanty<sup>18</sup> - i.e. dependant, traditional and in need of education by Western feminism - significantly disturbing and problematic. In this respect, a monolithic

---

<sup>17</sup> See 3.1.

<sup>18</sup> See 3.1.

conception of Kurdish women as ‘the oppressed’ creates distance between Kurdish and Turkish women, and affects the attempts of dialogue making negatively. Such an attitude from Turkish feminists is considered an impediment that prevents the spreading of more inclusive female perspectives and forms of action.

Rahime from *Gökkuşağı* remarks:

You are never the subject of the issue, you are ‘the oppressed’, ‘the victim’. That’s where the problem arises. They see themselves as the ‘emancipated’. They are the teaching ones.

Kurdish feminists and women accuse Turkish feminists of being uncritical of state discourses on the Kurdish issue and appropriating the same discourses in their own arguments. In this respect, it can be argued that Turkish women are seen by Kurdish women representatives as ‘state collaborators’, which makes any discussion of a ‘common cause’ very difficult. Moreover, what makes the matter more complicated and hard to resolve is Turkish feminist’s tendency to use the issue for their own interests and each group’s looking at it from their own side. Rahime from *Gökkuşağı* maintains:

There are a few independent women’s organizations that look at the Kurdish women’s issues differently, however, generally most of them either side with the state, and see it as a backwardness problem rising from lack of education or consider it a general problem arising from Kurdish women’s need for emancipation. They establish organizations that use the language of the state such as *The Mother’s Association* and *Turkish Women’s Association* to help Kurdish women.

Humeyra from *Başak Sanat Vakfı* criticizes the scope of the women’s movement in general for encompassing a specific, elite group of women. The class exclusions of the women’s movement, along with tensions between independent and other women’s organizations also prevents the expansion of the movement and network of organization for creating a basis for collaboration among women.

The independent women's organizations always criticize the non-independent ones and the non-independent ones criticize the independent ones. They are generally constantly arguing and do not do much to spread the movement.

Turkish feminists' insistence on overlooking the complexities of class, ethnicity and the relationship with the Turkish state in the lives of Kurdish women is an important aspect of the way that the 'two sides' have closed in on each other. One is reminded of Donna Haraway's configuration of the cyborg: a model aimed at critiquing the homogenization of the sisterhood, on the one hand, and recognizing the multiple forms of domination affecting women in different ways on the other.<sup>19</sup> Thus in the case of Turkish and Kurdish women, coalition requires being open to recognizing the heterogeneity between the women groups, understanding the different hardships they might experience and working on them together, communicating with others without trying to change them, and acknowledging that our understanding of ourselves and others do not necessarily need to be "static to be specific".<sup>20</sup>

Hümeyra maintains:

We, as Kurdish women always find ourselves trying to convince some people, especially Turkish feminists. We always feel the need to tell other women's organizations, as Kurdish women, we have some kind of uniqueness and have specific problems. It is not only Kurdish women who can help Kurdish women.

McClintock highlights the fact that feminism becomes imperialist when it privileges the interests of the women in the imperialist countries over the local interests of women<sup>21</sup>.

In this regard, it can be argued that Turkish feminism can have an oppressive effect as a 'quasi-imperialist' country which appropriates women's movements and feminist agendas and collapses the complexities of domestic affairs into an internally articulated problem of 'Us' and 'Them'. Rahime accentuates the hardships of Kurdish women in this context:

---

<sup>19</sup> See 3.2.

<sup>20</sup> See 3.2.

<sup>21</sup> See 3.1.

Turkish feminism has been very poor in its attempt to encompass the multiple difficulties Kurdish women experience. Turkish feminists overlook the fact that Kurdish women suffer due to their ethnicity, forced displacement from their lands, poverty related to the conflict. Feminism is not just about problematizing the lack education, feminization of the labor force and underrepresentation of Turkish women.

A crucial point to highlight here is that the tension and contestation between the women and feminists can not merely be framed around ‘Kurdish’ versus ‘Turkish’ women. Kurdish women have diverse approaches to the issues mentioned above. One of the most important aspects is to keep in mind that different women are affected differently by wars and conflicts. Hence, it is crucial to look into the inequalities among women when evaluating their relation to the conflicts and their resolution. As Cupples states, women’s differences between them – which often lead to political and economic inequalities- may challenge their wish for peace and be very difficult to overcome<sup>22</sup>. Accentuating the class difference among Kurdish women, Sahhanım from *Başak Kültür Sanat Vakfı* criticizes the Kurdish women’s movement:

How much do Kurdish feminists and poor Kurdish women come together? They deal with the rights and issues concerning elite women. They are not sensitive to the differences among them. They overlook the women in the periphery and work in the centers. What do they do for the woman who sells her wedding band to buy milk for her daughter? The conflict affects the poor women the most.

It is perhaps no exaggeration to claim that one of the most important issues considered as the obstacle against women’s dialogue making and collaboration for peace is the tension around the debates about identity politics. It can also be argued that while Kurdish women see the appropriation of the state discourse and the monolithic perception of the Kurdish women by Turkish women as victims and the ones to be taught as an impediment to coalition, Turkish

---

<sup>22</sup> See 3.2.

women evaluate Kurdish women's tendency to prioritize and emphasize their ethnic identity as a challenge to peace.

Although Turkish women do not reject identities, they question their connotations vis-à-vis power relations, patriarchy and contact with the others. Their main point is that the notion of identity becomes related to power and power relations and thus patriarchal when it is politicized. Moreover, it becomes identity within power relations. Nil maintains that: "You remember that you are a Turk when you go to Greece".<sup>23</sup>

Identity politics can also serve for reductionism or misrepresentation. Connolly elaborates on the issue by arguing that identity needs differences to secure its certainty and it converts these differences into otherness<sup>24</sup>. Identity politics, on this ground reifies this Otherness and prevents the attempts of getting in touch with one another, among groups or collaborate for common aims. Nil maintains:

Identity politics prevent us from getting to know each other. The prohibitions and laws in Turkey around the Kurdish issue made it worse in Turkey. We know something about the person we communicate with and we think what we know is true. On top of that, identity politics comes and identities get fetishized and we make politics based on that vague knowledge about the other. It is like the end of conversation.

It can further be debated that identity is a notion that prevents acknowledging differences since differences are reified within identity. Nil from *Amargi* grants an example from daily life:

Women in the Southeast of Turkey do what we could not do in the West. They succeed in developing dialogue without putting identity politics into their lives. They cook together, feed their kids together and laugh together without a word of identity and, then when their husbands come home they act like nothing has happened.

---

<sup>23</sup> The political and historical tension between Turkey and Greece is referred to here by Nil. When a Turk goes to Greece he/she is reminded of his/her otherness and thus holds onto his/her national identity.

<sup>24</sup> See 3.1.



Turkish women call for the creation of a new language for peace. However, identity politics is treated as an obstacle to the creation of that language and the way to peace. While listing the aspects that prevent attempts for peace-building, Nil remarks:

There should not be any reason to stop people who start off for peace. However, we come to a certain extent and then do not go further, we stop there. Identity politics and Kurdish and Turkish nationalities feeding from them are the RED LINES that keep women away from each other.

Hümeýra compares the approaches to identity to the treatment of the state toward issues related to identity politics. Yuval-Davis elaborates on challenging the fixed notion of identity taking into consideration different experiences. On this ground, unlike Nil, she considers identity as a means that serves to prevent unity and recognize differences. As Bastian emphasizes coalition should seek to find “possibilities of grounding political work in something other than unity”,<sup>25</sup>:

We criticize the state for not being flexible towards the differences; however, the women from both sides do the same thing. Everyone is expected to think the same or same as I think. Ethnic identity can not be important by itself. I think women identity is important. However, we should not ignore different identities. Kurdish women may have unique problems.

Pinar’s attitude towards identity relates to Yuval-Davis’s treatment of identity vis-à-vis the target strived for. She argues for a productive production in which what matters is not ‘who we are’, [but] what we want to achieve’<sup>26</sup>. However, Pinar adds another aspect that is crucial, which is the way one should act on the way to that achievement. She also draws attention to the enriching role of these identities for development. In this regard, it can be argued, as Haraway maintains, that conflicting identities and ideas can be significantly fruitful for reinforcing dialogue and coalition<sup>27</sup>. Secomb calls this “productive disagreement”<sup>28</sup>. Drawing on the example of *Amargi* and the way women work:

---

<sup>25</sup> See chapter III.

<sup>26</sup> See chapter III.

<sup>27</sup> See chapter III.

<sup>28</sup> See chapter III.

We work with women with various ethnicities, identities. One does not have to compromise. We have some main principles in the organization. Such conflicts are productive. However, these conflicts should be discussed democratically. They should be transparent, open and non-violent. The reason we have been working together for 8 years and we can survive is due to that conflicting spirit, but in a democratic way. Each woman in the organization has her own initiative to create projects, there is administration and we are striving to create a non-hierarchical relationship and go beyond that logic of hierarchy in *Amargi*.

However, the approach *Amargi* has towards the notion of identity does not help to hold all the women with different identities together. In this regard, it can be argued that recognizing identities is not the only condition of creating a ground in which women work together in peace and for peace. As I mentioned above ‘how’ you achieve what you want to achieve becomes crucial in the case of Kurdish and Turkish women. *Amargi* can actually be considered the microcosmos of this context and Pinar puts it very well exemplifying *Amargi*:

I told you we have no problems with identities. We have had separations within *Amargi*. The real problem emerges from the different political views women have. I do not mean that we should all have the same political views. However, what separates us from each other has to do with the ways we would like approach our goals. I mentioned our basic principles to you. We are against any kind of violence, we are anti-militarist. This is our policy and politics. Unfortunately, this is where the dialogue ends, separation starts and faces are turned against each other especially between Kurdish and Turkish women.

When asked about the chances and attempts for peace Nil maintains:

There has been many and crucial attempts for establishing dialogue and coalition for peace-building such as the Batman and Diyarbakır women’s meeting. However, there are such strong RED LINES between Kurdish and Turkish women that they keep away from each other. The space open to dialogue is incredibly narrow in Turkey. People who are open to dialogue, who can criticize themselves and who can face the problems concerning the conflict is very few. We should both question our mistakes. If we can manage getting to know each other, a common language will emerge from there. We should find that new language that recognizes one another.

And again, Zehra’s perspective on the issue is as follows:

I believe Turkish women have prejudices against Kurdish women. Of course, one reason for this is our privileging national demands over gender issues. Turkish women’s organizations should be able to say that they do not want this conflict in their country anymore. When it comes to working for peace with Kurdish women, Turkish women are not courageous enough. It is an issue that could burn you. There have been attempts; however, we do not have a strong lobby. We are not organized. It seems to me that the points of divergences go in the way of convergence.

Taking into consideration the factors that create tension between Kurdish and Turkish women, especially the debates about identity and identity politics, I will give an account of

the discourses women generate around the issues of violence, war and peace in the next chapter I will specifically focus on the ambiguities and contradiction within their discourse as factors that prevent them from getting in touch with each other and meet on the common grounds to collaborate for peace.

## ***4.2 The ambiguities around the discourse of violence, militarism and peace***

In this chapter, I evaluate the different perspectives of both Kurdish and Turkish women about the issues of war, violence and peace. In order to do this, I will scrutinize the ways women from both sides relate themselves to the notions of nationalism, militarism and patriarchy. My focus will be on the ambiguities within the discourses generated by Kurdish and Turkish women. In this regard, I argue that the ambiguity and contradiction reflected in women's words around violence, war and peace makes the dialogue of the two sides difficult and becomes an obstacle to the coalition of these women for peace.

As I mentioned in the history section this conflict reinforced the nationalisms of both sides and the ongoing conflict between the state forces and PKK guerillas has brought militarism and the patterns of it into the very depths of people's lives. In Turkey's context of conflict, the scene may crudely be summarized as:

- Kurdish men fighting against the Turkish state and Turkish men
- Turkish men fighting against Kurdish men
- Kurdish women also fighting against Turkish state and Turkish men along with Kurdish men.

What is significant here is that although there is another group, which is Turkish and Kurdish women fighting against Kurdish and Turkish men within and outside of the conflict, Kurdish and Turkish women can not come together and work in collaboration to criticize this vicious circle and create a language of peace. Instead they create two groups in conflict, those of 'Kurdish' versus 'Turkish' women. Therefore, the question 'peace ever?' becomes very meaningful in this context. As I highlighted in the historical chapter, the conflict becomes inevitable because it is a constitutional conflict, inscribed in the legal order, and what is at

stake is the contested territory. Moreover, the transnational aspect of the conflict makes it even more complex and should also be taken into consideration in reference to the recent Northern Iraq bombings<sup>29</sup>. In this respect, questioning the relationship between nationalism, violence, militarism and patriarchy becomes crucial.

One of the most important discrepancies between the two sides is the way they perceive violence vis-à-vis the Kurdish/Turkish conflict. A significant reason that the tension arises from is Kurdish women's limited and one-sided criticism of violence. Although they criticize political mechanisms of militarism, violence is only problematized when it comes to the violence applied by the Turkish state. Thus, Kurdish women demonstrate an ambiguity within their discourse of violence and militarism. In this respect, it can be argued that Kurdish women's criticism against violence is conditional and violence can be legitimized when it comes to national struggle:

The Turkish army should stop its violence. I think the Turkish army wants to perpetuate this war. Turkish army is reinforcing the militaristic power. It creates an enemy in the eyes of the society. You have a funeral each day; you say I will finish this. Next day there is another funeral. When you grow up in that environment of conflict and one day when you encounter an opposing movement, you join. You can not tell those people not to fight<sup>30</sup>.

Another ambiguity arises when Kurdish women separate violence into two categories such as domestic violence and the violence of the state, which are both men's violence towards women. In this respect, gender perspective is overlooked and considered trivial vis-à-vis the national cause. Moreover, Kurdish women does not mention the violence experienced by women through the militarist acts of the Kurdish guerilla men for national independence of the nation, since they do not perceive that violence as being directed towards them. Thus, violence *within the national struggle* is legitimized through this silence. This situation can be

---

<sup>29</sup> See chapter II.

<sup>30</sup> Rahime from *Gökkuşuğu*.

considered an example of the ambiguity between feminism and nationalism in which women have been expected to choose between feminism and nationalism because nationalism has been privileged over gender concerns and has forced women to delay their demands until after national independence.

Of course, Kurdish women experience violence in the family by her husband. However, she supports and yells for the national struggle of her nation in March 8th, not for the violence she faces at home. Her children die in the struggle. You can not tell that women to protest against domestic violence. It would be ridiculous<sup>31</sup>.

An opposing perspective comes from Pınar Selek, in her evaluation on the notions of nationalism, militarism and patriarchy. She criticizes the discourse that praises violence for national causes and highlights the importance of considering the issue from a holistic and strongly pacifist perspective, and argues that nationalism, militarism and patriarchy are the mechanisms that are in constant relation to each other and feed from each other<sup>32</sup>. First of all, through her criticism of the violence applied by the state, she problematizes violence between the different groups in the society, and thus violence in general. Pınar maintains:

It has become such a way in the society that the more the state applies power, the more acceptable the violence of the oppressed became in a deterministic way. If he does this, this is what happens. Even the opposing groups can not take themselves out of this tendency. I see it is difficult to lead a politics of peace, however the other way around is easier.

In this respect, it can be argued that under the conditions of the existing situation both the violence of the ones in power and the ones that are oppressed are being legitimized and are being used as the tools of politics.

Another conspicuous approach some Kurdish women I interviewed have toward war is the way they construct war as a condition for peace or passageway to peace. Moreover, this war is considered the key to their survival. It seems that war, which is violence, is considered the only way to their survival. Rahime maintains:

Kurdish people do not enjoy this war. They want this war to end. However, Kurds will not give up their existence. We struggle for peaceful days.

---

<sup>31</sup> Zehra from *Gökkuşağı*.

<sup>32</sup> See chapter III.

However, she displays a strong contradiction to the issue in her words when asked about her hopes for the future and chances for peace. Criticizing the Turkish state she remarks:

Everything is being invested in war. It brings decadence to society. An existence that says everything is a detail when it comes to the protection of the homeland. An approach that says every detail is trivial when it comes to war.

Cynthia Enloe maintains that militarism and nationalism have arisen from a masculinized memory and masculinized hopes<sup>33</sup>. On this ground, taking into consideration Kurdish women's evaluation for the future of the struggle, it can be argued that militarism and nationalism can lead to masculinized hopes that invest solutions to violence:

Are Kurds going to disappear? Each of them is bombs and guns that will shoot the system and themselves constantly. They grow up much more consciously and full of revenge than ever. No one can eradicate Kurd's country or the Kurds. Steps are being taken to reinforce the future of their struggle and strengthen Kurds in terms of arms. Kurds have been developing war strategies again<sup>34</sup>.

Another ambiguity arises within Kurdish women's discourse about war and peace when their roles and significance within them are taken into consideration. The first contradiction becomes visible when Zehra from *Gökkuşagi* presents her essentialist conception of women as being peaceful by nature as I discussed above after all the emphasis put on war. However, it becomes even more interesting when she maintains:

I believe women do not have a warrior spirit by nature. They only fight whenever they are obliged to. They fight in order to defend their nation. Women who are in peace struggle end up with guns in their hands.

On this ground, we encounter a four-fold assumption pattern in her words. One is that fighting for one's nation is an obligation for Kurdish women, the other is that peace struggle peace

---

<sup>33</sup> See chapter III.

<sup>34</sup> Rahime from *Gokkusagi*.

struggle is only possible via taking up arms. And the last one is that women have no choice over whether to struggle using arms or not. It is considered inevitable.

Another significant point emerges when Rahime approaches the issue from another but similar perspective in which she associates men with a tendency towards war by nature. Although she also takes into account the historical and social dimension of the issue, the way she constitutes men's role and significance *vis-à-vis* war and women's role *vis-à-vis* punishment and men, bears another sign of essentialism.

On this ground, first of all, she locates punishment against war and considers it a method related to peace, and even love in the context of her story. Moreover, according to what Rahime says it can be argued that women can be not considered to re-define war; they can not be considered to redefine what men define.

It is men who determine the rules in militaristic methods because it is men who make decisions for wars. However, women should write the law of punishment. She has to define love again.

In terms of the treatment of men's significance in relation to and within war, Pınar, from *Amargi* rejects the essentialist treatment of the issue problematizing the social construction of masculinity and femininity in terms of the images created around it and the values attached to these images:

The issue of heroism is prevalent within the opposition politics. Some are the heroes. Who are they? Deniz Gezmiş<sup>35</sup> and all the PKK guerillas. Why? Masculinity and heroism are the two things everyone applauds in the society. Going against armed forces without arms, like Gandhi. The ones struggling for democracy are not considered heroes. Sabiha Gökçen<sup>36</sup> could be given as another example.

Pınar's approach towards violence differs from the Kurdish women's discourse about it because she does not treat violence of the either side differently. Taking into consideration the hero images she draws on in relation to violence, it can be argued that violence is both

---

<sup>35</sup> A leftist revolutionist who was hung by the Turkish State for his political views.

<sup>36</sup> The first women war pilot of the Turkish Republic.



masculinized and ‘herocized’ and thus prioritized to peaceful methods of struggle and conflict resolution. Her including a female figure in the picture refers to the ‘masculinized women’ image created within patriarchal/nationalist discourses of ‘resistance’. I would also argue that militarization and war politics nurture dominant notions of masculinity, voluntarily or non-voluntarily making women symbolic ‘additions’ to its systemic models (See Yuval-Davis 1997).

### ***4.3 Ambiguities around the discourse of women's role and significance within national movements***

In this chapter, I will analyze the different points of view of Turkish and Kurdish women about their perception of women's role and significance in the national project. In order to do this, I will focus on the ambiguities such as; the way women participate in the war and its effects on women. In this respect, I argue that Kurdish women's contradicting discourse about women's role in the national struggle and their privileging what I shall refer to as a 'virgin guerilla' image, privileged over gender concerns and creating tension between Turkish and Kurdish feminists.

When discussing Kurdish women's position within the Kurdish society and the Kurdish national movement<sup>37</sup>, the guerilla women image appeared to be the most prevalent and the most mentioned by the Kurdish women I interviewed. One of the reasons for this could be the change in the gender composition of the PKK movement and the visibilization of Kurdish guerilla women through the media and the academic work written on them. As Ozcan maintains the one third of the 'mountain team' consisted of women due to the participation of young women from various universities, the suburbs of the cities and the rural areas.(Caglayan 2007:101). However, it could be argued that the emphasis on the Kurdish women's discourse on guerilla women is not due to the quantity of female recruits, but rather to 'quality'. Guerilla women are considered a model representing the power of Kurdish women and heroines struggling for the independence of their nation. However, this perception of Kurdish guerilla women encompasses ambiguities and contradictions. Below, I will show these ambiguities drawing on Kurdish women's words from my interviews.

---

<sup>37</sup> What I mean here by 'the Kurdish national movement' is the struggle and the process that different parties, organizations, groups and individuals lead in order to create an agenda for the Kurdish issue. Thus, it can encompass a range of activities from the armed struggle to a simple presentation of Kurdish identity.

Fleischman argues that the notion of agency operates through opposition to colonial structures rather than gender identification<sup>38</sup>. However, following Kurdish women's words, I observed a different perspective to the issue that the participation of the women in the guerilla movement is considered to bring a two-fold 'consciousness' to Kurdish women. One is that Kurdish women realized the importance of the national cause and love for the nation. More importantly, Kurdish women became aware of their gender identity through their participation in the armed struggle. This struggle can be characterized as a struggle with men and against men. Thus, Kurdish women attain agency for gender issues through opposition to the state. I would agree that Kurdish women do receive a kind of agency through their guerilla role in the national movement. However, I problematize the nature of that agency and claim that becoming a guerilla, fighting with men, can be considered the only condition for attaining women consciousness. On this issue, Rahime maintains:

Kurdish women have had difficulties in their society because of being women. However, we also have national a national struggle and demands. Guerilla women are seen as the freedom fighters in eyes of the society. Guerilla women's struggle is very important because there, in the mountains they also struggle against men. They struggle to take part in the decision-making mechanisms. They do not participate in the projects they do not accept. It is the ultimate awakening of Kurdish women.

While becoming a guerilla is treated as an empowering act for Kurdish women in terms of gender concerns, Nil's words from *Amargi* raises an ambiguity:

Ocalan created an ideal image of women in the movement. Actually, it is not a monolithic type of woman. The mother image for example, and as you know, the untouched VIRGIN, fighting woman image in the guerilla movement. She is virgin because it is forbidden to fall in love, it is forbidden to have sex.

The constitution of the guerilla women as 'virgin' contradicts with the women image striving for gender identification. What is more striking within this discourse is that women's sexuality becomes a matter of negotiation in the national struggle. In this regard, it can be argued that despite Kurdish women's discourse on the emancipatory aspect of the Kurdish

---

<sup>38</sup> See Theoretical Framework.

guerilla movement for women, as Yuval-Davis points out women's role as the bearers of the honor<sup>39</sup> and identity of the nation actually perpetuates in the Kurdish national movement.

Moreover, Zehra from Gökkuşığı adds up to the ambiguity with her words about the issue of honor:

The presence of the guerilla women has been very influencing for Kurdish women. Honor crimes are prevalent in the Kurdish land. Whenever women became guerillas the concept of honor finished there. No one looked at them that way.

Following Zehra's words I would read the comment as; the issue of honor seems to 'finish there' *because* no men looked at Kurdish guerilla women that way. In this regard, it can be argued that those women are not associated with honor because they are not considered to be women anymore, they are merely soldiers. While the image of virgin women is all about sexuality, this kind of perception of women is based on her sexlessness /asexuality.

The combination of the conception of 'virgin women' and 'soldier women' could also come to mean what Caglayan highlights about the condition of love in the process of revolution in which the sexual love is replaced with the love for the homeland.(Caglayan 2007) In this regard, sexual love cannot be experienced before the independence of the nation.

Another crucial point concerning the women identity and women's role within the national movement arises also generating an ambiguity in Kurdish women's evaluation of the issue. It is very common in the feminist literature tracing issues about national projects that women take various roles in the ethnic/national projects such as; being mothers, reproducers of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997) Almost all of these roles are symbolic, except for the one role in

---

<sup>39</sup> In the state discourses, there is a common tendency of referring crimes of honor as crimes of tradition. The term crimes of tradition points out to the southeastern region of Turkey and Kurdish people living there. "To single out the Southeast implies that honor crimes are primarily a Kurdish phenomenon, as the area is populated primarily by Kurds."(Kogacioglu 2004:130) So honor crimes are represented as a problematic of specific region with a specific ethnic community rather than as a general question.

which they are the active participants of the national, political and military struggles.(Yuval-Davis 1997). Taking into account Rahime's words encapsulating her life story, my analysis at this point will focus on the possibility of the interchangeability of these roles, and their significance. Rahime remarks:

I got married at the age of fifteen. I was a mother at the age of eighteen. One day 'the revolutionists came over. I started reading. It is not the kind of life you like, there are social codes. Why getting trapped among four walls! Active struggle is the best thing. You create a space for yourself to move. I would definitely go to the mountains if I were not married with children. It is a very passionate thing! You hate the system all over and you go to the mountains to fight, which is the most beautiful, cleanest and the most passionate place.

Evaluating the Kurdish context and Yuval Davis's categorization, it can be argued that Kurdish women's motherhood role becomes an obstacle to her transfer to the more active role of being a guerilla women. In this regard, I would claim that these roles become exclusionary, and an either or situation emerges in which the women have to choose between the two roles assigned to them through the national project. Taking into account Rahime's giving up her passion and strong wish for becoming a guerilla due to her motherhood, another striking point to consider within this discourse emerges, which is what Handan Caglayan (1997) refers to as Kurdish women's 'internalization level' of the women identity defined by the hegemonic discourse of the Kurdish national movement.

Conflicting views about women's agency and mobilization through their participation in the guerilla war also come from Kurdish women from different organizations. Zehra from *Gökkuşığı* states:

We can not ignore the fact that Kurdish women awakened through the national movement. Telling that it is because of men would not be a realistic approach. It was not like the men came and grabbed the women and took her into the mountains. The men were fighting against a tangible enemy, but women were sitting there in her usual place. No doubt, it is not a war intended and decided by women. Women's participation in the war is only due to necessity.

On the contrary, Sahhanım from *Gökkuşığı* briefly expresses her view on the issue:

Of course, I find women's struggle very important, however women should question their position in the movement critically especially in the guerilla movement. It is the same thing in the guerilla movement. Women follow men.

The contradictory perspectives by the two Kurdish women can be considered an example for the ambiguous role of the women in the national project. As I discussed above while scholars such as Yuval-Davis emphasize women's potential agency through political and militaristic acts, Anne McClintock in her evaluation of the Algerian women's participation in the Algerian Revolution argues that women's agency is realized through the invitation of women by men, who holds the power due to his 'inviter' status (Altınay 2000:26). In this respect, drawing on McClintock's argument in relation to Zehra's comments, I will claim that Kurdish women are included or invited into the struggle (by Kurdish men) by creating a discourse of 'need' or necessity, based on the extraordinary conditions of the conflict. Thus, this invitation is justified by this necessity, which means the good of the nation. Moreover, women's consent to it is enabled by the very same discourse, which could be explained in a similar way with reference to Karen Offen's mode of 'relational feminism', in which collective good is prioritized over the individual good of women.<sup>40</sup> I would further argue that women's taking up arms in this context is also legitimized through this very discourse of need due to the extraordinary situation of the war.

Sahhanım, from *Basak Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı* brings a vitally important dimension into the debate also related to the extraordinary, which is temporary condition of the war:

Perhaps women opened up a space for freedom, a different mission in the guerilla struggle; however, they could not maintain this position. The women who saw that political sphere as an area for independence, committed suicide during the cease fire period<sup>41</sup>. The suicide rates increased. She felt despair because she felt a lack in her life. Her expectations were not fulfilled. She went back home and got entrapped.

---

<sup>40</sup> See chapter III.

<sup>41</sup> See Historical Background.

Kurdish women's agency conditioned by its presentation (by men) as 'necessity' due to the extraordinary conditions of war, ceases when that necessity is no longer there. In this respect, it can be argued that the same agency which is considered to be emancipating and empowering for women becomes a source of devastation because it is not a genuine agency, aiming at transformation, it is actually based on the extraordinary and temporary conditions of war and temporary.

## Conclusions

Taking into account the historical developments from the Ottoman Empire to the contemporary Turkey, we can easily claim that the Kurdish question is still at the very core of the Turkish politics. Moreover, the unresolved conflict along with the low-intensity war has caused great pain and immense social, economical and human damage for three decades. The Turkish state overlooked the Kurdish question and applied disciplinary, unjust and undemocratic restrictions. Unfortunately, almost no concrete attempt has been done for the resolution of the issue on the state level.

The attempts came from the civil society and the civil actors. Organizations have been founded, conferences have been held; however none of these attempts have been long-lasting and very effective. Feminists and the women's organizations have done the most and thought the issue deeply over. However, the most crucial point is that if these attempts have been effective, if the Kurdish and Turkish women, as the two sides of the conflict, have been in peace with each other so that they can collaborate to change the existing situation towards a state of peace.

In order to see the broader picture I asked; how do women's organizations/politically active women participate in the process of conflict resolution? What kind of discourses on do women's organizations/politically active women generate or make use of on peace and peace-building? I have claimed that the tension between Kurdish and Turkish women/feminisms and the ambiguity within the peace discourse generated around the issues of nationalism, violence, militarism and patriarchy vis-à-vis the women of the two sides makes it difficult for these women to come together and collaborate for peace-building and making dialogue.



Therefore, in order to reveal the perspectives to the conflict and how they are reflected in the peace-building attempts, I conducted six semi-structured interviews with Kurdish and Turkish women from three different women's organizations.

One of the conclusions of this thesis is that the tension between the Turkish feminists and the Kurdish women/feminists hinders these women from establishing further dialogue and work together for the resolution of the conflict. The monolithic perception of the Kurdish women by Turkish feminists, their tendency to overlook the complexities of ethnicity, class and the relationship with the Turkish state impedes the appropriation of a more inclusive women perspective and forms of action. Here one should also note that identity politics that operates through and within power relations and as a notion that serves reductionism and reification of differences escalates tension between the two parties and creates an obstacle for the creation of a language for peace.

Besides the tension between Turkish feminists and Kurdish women on the issues above, another conclusion I drew from my interviews is that the discourse women make use of around the issue of peace encompasses many ambiguities/contradictions. The ambiguities around nationalism, violence, militarism and peace creates the biggest tension since these contradicting and differing perspectives are the factors that separate the two sides entirely and make it impossible to take action for peace in the first place. *Amargi*'s policy, which excludes and rejects any form of violence emphasizing the relationship between nationalism, militarism and patriarchy, is purely opposed to the Kurdish women's perspective from *Gökkuşağı*, which finds violence acceptable under the conditions of national struggle. Kurdish women's conditional and selective treatment of violence closes the doors of dialogue to Turkish women and one another and, which makes coalition impossible.

Kurdish women's treatment of women's roles and significance as the mothers of the nation, bearers of the honor of the nation and in contrast empowered women within the national

movement encounters with Turkish feminists' problematization of the concepts. Kurdish women's privileging these images over gender concerns creates tension between the two sides and prevents meeting on common grounds.

The differences among the Kurdish women towards the issues mentioned above and the critique of one treatment by another Kurdish woman is another crucial conclusion I drew from this research. Kurdish women from *Basak Sanat ve Kültür Vakfı* questions the scope of Kurdish women's movement for its exclusionary attitude towards women from lower class and problematizes women's role within and outside of the armed struggle emphasizing the negative effects of it. This shows that not every Kurdish women and Turkish women share the same view on the issues of militarism, nationalism, identity politics and gender concerns. I only researched the perspectives of two Turkish and four Kurdish women who are educated, middle-class and members of three different civil women's organizations. Therefore, my study is not representative of the views by all Kurdish and Turkish women from different educational backgrounds and class positions and this should be taken into consideration before any generalizations about the peace discourse generated and made use of by women.

## References

- Akyol, Mustafa. 2006. *Kurt Sorununu Yeniden Düşünmek: Yalnız Giden Neydi? Bundan Sonra Nereye?* (Rethinking the Kurdish Question). Istanbul: Dogan Kitap.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Anthias, Floya and Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1989. "Introduction." Pp. 6-11 in *Women-Nation-State*, edited by F. Anthias and N. Yuval Davis. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Bastian, Michelle. 2006. "Haraway's Lost Cyborg and the Possibilities of Transversalism." *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 31(4):1027-1049
- Bickford, Susan. 1997. "Anti-Anti-Identity Politics: Feminism, Democracy, and the Complexities of Citizenship." *Hypatia* 12:4: 111-31.
- Brown, Wendy. 1995. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1999 [1990]. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Pp. 35-46. New York: Routledge. (see below)
- Caglayan, Handan. 2007. *Analar, Yoldaslar, Tanrılar: Kurt Hareketinde Kadınlar ve Kadın Kimliğinin Olusumu* (Mothers, Fellows, Goddesses). Istanbul: İletişim.
- Cockburn, Cynthia. 1998. *The Space between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict*. London, New York: Zed Books.
- Connolly, William. 2002. *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cornell, Drucilla. 2000. *Just Cause: Freedom, Identity, and Rights*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Dodd, C. H. 1990 *The Crisis of Turkish Democracy*, The Eothen Press.
- Enloe, Cynthia. 1990 *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Firestone, Shulamith. 1970. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. New York: Morrow. (see below)
- Fleischmann, Ellen L. 2003. *The Nation and Its 'New' Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement 1920-1948*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Fontana, Adrea and Frey, James H. 2003. "Interviewing The Art of Science" Pp. 47-78 in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, edited by Norman Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln. London: Sage Publications.

- Gellner, Ernest. 1998. *Nationalism*. London: Phoenix.
- Haraway, Donna 1991 *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Routledge, New York, 1991.
- Heyes, Cressida J. 2000. *Line Drawings: Defining Women through Feminist Practice*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Jayawardena, Kumari. 1992. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. London Zed Books.
- Keyman, Fuat. 2005. "Articulating Citizenship and Identity." Pp. 267-288 in *Citizenship in a Global World: European Questions and Turkish Experiences*, edited by E. Fuat Keyman and Ahmet İçduygu. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kirisci, Kemal and Winrow, Gareth M. 1998. *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict*. London, Portland: Frank Cass.
- Kruks, Sonia. 2000. *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. (see below)
- Labov, W. 1972 "The Transformation of experience in narrative syntax" in *Narrative Analysis*. London, Sage, 1993. Pp. 1-79.
- Mohanty, C.T. 1988. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse" *Feminist Review*. No. 30 (Autumn 1988).
- McClintock, Anne 1997 *Dangerous liaisons: gender, nation, and postcolonial perspectives*. Eds McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat. Mineapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Portelli, Alessandro. 1998. "What Makes Oral History Different" in *the Oral History Reader* p. 70.
- Reinharz, Shulamith 1992 *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Riessman, C. K. 1987 "When gender is not enough: Women interviewing women" in *Narrative Analysis 1993*, Sage Publications.
- Selek, Pinar.2004. *Barisamadik* (We could not make peace). Istanbul: İthaki Yayinlari. Pp. 25-47.
- Skjelsbaek, Inger. 2001. "Is Femininity Inherently Peaceful? The Construction of Femininity in the War." Pp. 47-67 in *Gender, Peace and Conflict*, edited by Inder Skjelsbaek and Dan Smith. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Spelman, Elizabeth V. 1988. *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. Boston: Beacon.
- Stake, Robert E. 2003."Case Studies" Pp. 134-164 in *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S.Lincoln. London: Sage Publications.

- Sweetman, Caroline 2004. "Editorial" in *Gender and Development* Vol. 12, No.3, November.
- Taspinar, Omer. 2005. *Kurdish Nationalism and political Islam in Turkey: Kemalist Identity in Transition*. New York: Routledge.
- Tickner, Ann J. 2001. *Gendering World Politics: Issues and Approaches in the Post-Cold War Era*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Tickner, Ann 2005 "What is Your Research Program? Some Feminist Answers to International Relations Methodological Questions", *International Studies Quarterly*.
- Van Bruinessen M. 199. "The Ethnic Identity of the Kurds" in P. Andrews (ed.), *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey*, Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, p. 618.
- Yegen, Mesut. 1998. "The Turkish State Discourse and the Exclusion of Kurdish Identity" Pp. 216-229 in *Turkey: Identity, Democracy and Politics*, edited by Sylvia Kedourie. London, Portland: Frank Cass.
- Yegen, Mesut. 1999. *Devlet Soyleminde Kurt Sorunu* (The Kurdish Question in Turkish State Discourse). Istanbul: Iletisim Yayinlari.
- Young, Iris Marion. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1997. *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage Publications.
- [www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/entries/identity-politics](http://www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/entries/identity-politics)



## **Appendix**

### ***Organizations***

#### ***Basak Kultur ve Sanat Vakfi***

Basak Kultur was established in 2002 by Sahhanim Kanat and a number of volunteers who were working in the occupations related with the issues concerning the children and youth. Their aim is to encourage and support poor and deprived children and teenagers who are the victims of the forced migration. They help the children to discover their artistic talents through which they can express themselves freely and contribute to society as healthy individuals. They do not define their organization as a feminist one; however, they state that they give priority to women and their issues. They are basically interested in the issues related with children and women, since the unemployment, poverty , migration and domestic violence affect badly the children and women most. They state that the future of the society is the children and youth.

#### ***Amargi***

The meaning of the term Amargi is “freedom” and “returning to the mother” in Sumerian language which reflect their feminist standpoint very well. By directly referring to their feminist approach, they define as a feminist organization which aims to recreate women among patriarchal social relations. One of the distinct characteristics of Amargi is that it embraces women who are from different ethnic and social backgrounds. They are questioning “the male mentality and rationality” through which they try to spread the feminist theory and alternative strategies against the patriarchal system. Their main target is women who learn in Amargi through living. In this sense, Amargi was set up as a Women Academy; however

unlike the other academic institutions sanctioned by the state, Amargi opens up a space where women learn to how to love living and how to change the world around.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Gokkusagi***

It was established in the 1990s in Istanbul as an organization representing women's movement. Although they do not define themselves as a feminist organization they state that they have a feminist approach in which they particularly target 'Kurdish' women. They argue that Kurdish women need an organization which directly represents Kurdish women on ethnic basis. Their approach stems from Kurdish women's movement vis-à-vis world women's movement.

---

<sup>42</sup> See <http://www.amargi.org.tr>