



**European Journal of Turkish Studies**

Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey

14 | 2012

**Ideological Productions and Transformations: the  
Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Left**

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Possibilities and limits

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### **Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4657>

DOI: 10.4000/ejts.4657

ISSN: 1773-0546

### **Publisher**

EJTS

### **Electronic reference**

Handan Çağlayan, « From Kawa the Blacksmith to Ishtar the Goddess: Gender Constructions in Ideological-Political Discourses of the Kurdish Movement in post-1980 Turkey », *European Journal of Turkish Studies* [Online], 14 | 2012, Online since 18 January 2013, connection on 16 February 2020.

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/4657> ; DOI : 10.4000/ejts.4657

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# From Kawa the Blacksmith to Ishtar the Goddess: Gender Constructions in Ideological-Political Discourses of the Kurdish Movement in post-1980 Turkey

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- <sup>1</sup> One of the distinctive characteristics of the Kurdish movement<sup>1</sup> in post-1980 Turkey is the fact that the movement has been successful in mobilizing women in masses. Women's participation in Kurdish rebellions is not unprecedented. There were women participants among the revolting forces in Kurdish rebellions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, these women were exceptionally low in numbers, and they consisted mainly of wives, daughters, and relatives of the leaders of the revolts.
- <sup>2</sup> After 1980, in contrast, women participated in the Kurdish movement to such a degree that the gender composition of the movement in general was seriously affected. Throughout the 1990s, many women went up to the mountains in order to join the 'guerrillas.' In the legal field, women started to take active roles in civil society organizations that opposed human rights violations and in pro-Kurdish political parties. Within these organizations, women reached influential positions both in decision-making and in administration, and were even elected as mayors and deputies.
- <sup>3</sup> Besides these activities, women's success in bringing up questions regarding women's equality and injecting these questions into the political agenda of the Kurdish movement has led some to analyze Kurdish women's dynamism within the context of black feminism.<sup>2</sup>

- 4 Geographically, Kurds are inhabitants of what is sometimes called the *patriarchal belt*<sup>3</sup>; similar to the neighboring peoples of the same geography, the roles and the places of Kurdish men and women are gendered, and women are expected to limit themselves to tasks that are considered appropriate for them.<sup>4</sup> When the influence of *namus*<sup>5</sup> — defined through the surveillance of women's bodies, behaviors, and sexualities by men — is taken into account, women's political participation becomes all the more noteworthy.
- 5 The Kurdish movement's ideological-political discourse is also worth emphasizing. Unlike the Kurdish nationalist discourse of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which included women mainly as symbols and boundary-markers in the construction of the Kurdish identity as a different and modern identity (Klein, 2001), women's appearance in the public sphere and their political mobilization plays an important role in the ideological and political texts of the post-1980 Kurdish movement. Themes related to women's equality especially gained weight in the late 1990s, when the active participation of women in the Kurdish movement, both as politicians and as 'fighters,' increased. In the same period, one also observes a change in the mythical sources that served the construction of Kurdishness as a political identity. The myth of *Kawa the Blacksmith*<sup>6</sup>, which is acknowledged as the founding myth of Kurdishness, seems to have given way, to a considerable extent if not entirely, to a new myth in the late 1990s, the myth of *Ishtar the Goddess*<sup>7</sup>, an important figure belonging to the Neolithic cult of goddesses. Although both myths — the myth of the Kawa the Blacksmith and the myth of the Ishtar the Goddess — emphasize historical continuity from the prehistoric peoples of Mesopotamia and the Neolithic rural revolution until today, and thereby allow the construction of a continuous identity of Kurdishness, the new myth also breaks with the older one by emphasizing a historical period and structure in which women were active.
- 6 It is possible to evaluate these two myths in the context of the cultural decolonization processes observed by Chatterjee (1993) in anti-colonial struggles. According to Chatterjee, these types of mythic fictions are closely related to political programs of the present, and involve an increasing sense of empowerment, as well as the developing trajectories of emancipation and independence. Nira Yuval-Davis (2003: 120) argues that the redefinition and reconstruction of gender relations, of which the shift in gender fictions from the former myth to the latter is a striking illustration, is of central importance within cultural decolonization processes. For Kandiyoti (1997: 151-152), however, nationalist projects present themselves simultaneously as a modern project that can transform traditional relations in favor of new identities, and as a resurrection of values belonging to a pure culture, rising from the depths of a shared social past; these projects, therefore, open up highly fluid and indeterminate meanings, which can be resurrected and reinterpreted at critical points in nation-state histories. Such meanings appear as a result of conflicts between political actors and their struggles, and thus profoundly affect definitions concerning *who* and *what* constitutes the nation, claims of national unity and alternative claims to sovereignty, and last but not least, conceptions about gender relations.
- 7 These subject matters make the Kurdish movement worth examining with regard to the mutual interaction between the national fictions and gender relations. This article aims to examine the Kurdish movement's ideological discourse from a gender perspective. The article argues that there is a mutual interaction between the Kurdish

movement's ideological discourse and the fact that women have been active political participants both as politicians and as 'fighters.' Furthermore, it is implied that this interaction has had a transformative effect on the way in which gender is constructed within the *new* Kurdish identity. It is claimed that the symbolic transformation concerning gender in the construction of Kurdish identity, which can be termed *from Kawa the Blacksmith to Ishtar the Goddess*, has limited and contradictory effects when seen from the perspective of the real lives of women.

- 8 The main theoretical ground for the analysis consists of feminist studies that demonstrate that national fictions and projects are gendered in nature, and that nationalism and gender are mutually co-constructive. In analyzing the new Kurdish identity from a gender perspective, we depart from Stuart Hall's evaluation that identities are social constructs (quoted in Stephen 2005: 66).
- 9 The majority of the primary sources consist of texts by the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. This is because the determining power in the post-1980 Kurdish movement in Turkey has been the PKK, the Marxist-Leninist Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*) founded in 1978, and the majority of the ideological texts of this Party consists of Öcalan's talks, seminars, and statements known as *analyses* (*çözümlemeler*).<sup>8</sup>
- 10 Although there are no strict restrictions concerning the texts to be analyzed, most of the texts belong to a particular time period, extending specifically from the 1980s to the 1990s. The selected time period is meaningful in that it allows a comparison between the texts of the 1980s, when the focus was to remove the barriers stopping women from participating, and the texts of the 1990s, produced after women started actively participating.
- 11 Although the perceptions and experiences of the women who have participated in the Kurdish movement could help discover the practical possibilities and the limits of the new definition of Kurdish identity, a definition that symbolically assigns a constitutive mission to women, the analysis in this article is limited to an examination of the ideological discourse of the movement.<sup>9</sup>In probing the Kurdish movement from a gender perspective, and in analyzing transformations that the movement underwent, the author also benefits from her own personal observations.

## 1. National Fictions and Gender

- 12 One of the common characteristics of ethnic and nationalist ideologies and movements is the fact that they depend on the constitution of myths that are forged around a particular collective identity. Although nationalist ideologies preach the omnitemporality of nations, nationalism studies in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have significantly altered our notions of nations, by showing that both nations and nationalism are modern phenomena dating back two centuries at most (Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 1990; Gellner 1998). These studies have showed that nations in the modern sense are 'imagined communities' and that most nations and nationalisms are constructed retrospectively, after the establishment of nation-states, through 'invented traditions.'
- 13 Feminist researchers have made significant contributions to nationalism studies by demonstrating that gender, the roles and meanings assigned to womanhood and manhood, plays a constitutive role in the construction of nationalist fictions. Studies

that identify nationalism as an open field where different loci of power compete not only provided visibility to women within nationalist practices, but also demonstrated that gender is at the heart of nationalist fictions and projects.

- 14 An important reference for these studies, which show that nationalism and modernization projects are intertwined in post-colonial societies, are the works of Kumari Jayawardena, who analyzes the anti-imperialist, anti-colonial struggles, and the process of nation-state building in Asia in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Jayawardena (1986) argues that in the countries she examined, feminism went hand in hand with anti-colonial pro-reform nationalist movements. According to Jayawardena, reformers believed that it was necessary to modernize society through internal reforms if they were to succeed in anti-imperialist struggles; therefore, they tried to eliminate pre-capitalist structures, especially the ruling dynasties and religious bigotry. This brought up the question of women taking part in the public sphere as equal citizens, and created the context in which feminism emerged (ibid.: 3). Jayawardena draws attention to the fact that in addition to modernization attempts, women's stepping out of homes is also related to the capitalist demand for cheap labor force (ibid.: 256), and shows that reform periods in most countries coincide with attempts at capitalist development, when women's cheap labor power began to be used both for production in factories and in the service sector.
- 15 On the other hand, the movements' need to emphasize national identity for mobilizing their societies against colonization brought women and womanhood into the agenda in a different context. While reforms envisaged women as modern, the emphasis on national identity also required women to be bearers and sustainers of the 'national culture.' As Jayawardena puts it, women were expected to be both 'modern' and 'traditional' simultaneously (1986: 14). Although the effects of the reforms were limited due to this contradiction, they generally had positive results for women; however, a common characteristic of all the countries Jayawardena examines is the fact that the question of the 'new woman' remained at the heart of discussions concerning the new society and the new configurations of power.
- 16 As Jayawardena also points out, women started to occupy an important place within the agenda of pro-reform nationalist movements from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Change and progress were the fundamental tenets of the period, and the discussions about how the 'new woman' should appear within this change—a change which was understood as a transition from 'traditional' to 'modern'—remained at the heart of discussions. Qasim Amin's book *The New Woman*, published in Egypt in 1901, gave voice to these concerns.
- 17 Feminist researchers who are suspicious towards this 'new woman' and 'women's liberation' agendas of the period argue that this agenda was not for women but for men, that it was about the male bourgeois reformers and their imaginations of modern society and modern family, subjecting women to new forms of patriarchal control. Kandiyoti (1997: 152), for instance, emphasizes that similar to the western colonizers, who used the ill fortunes of eastern women as signifiers of the barbarism and backwardness of colonized peoples, thereby declaring their own civilizations superior and legitimizing their sovereignty, modernist reformers, too, lamented the women's situation, seeing it as a sign of backwardness.
- 18 According to Nira Yuval-Davis (2003: 120), another researcher who is wary of the effects of these movements on women's positions, 'women's liberation' is one of the important

mechanisms for signifying both internal and external actions of ethnic and national projects towards modernization. Narratives of identity constitute the main instruments of the ethnic projects, while gender relations and sexuality play a crucial role in the cultural constitution of difference. In *Gender, Nation, State* (1989), Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias demonstrate the different duties and missions that are assigned to women in this context. In so doing, nationalist projects and constructions see women as reproducers of the ethnic/national community, both biologically and culturally. Their duty as reproducers paves the way for the control over women's bodies, fertilities, and behaviors in the name of the nation. Women's clothing and behaviors are bestowed critical significance in drawing the cultural boundaries of the ethnic-national communities, or to put it differently, in the self-constitution of communities as different and distinct from their counterparts. It is assumed that women are signifiers and carriers of the authentic 'essence' of the nation. This is another serious burden of representation for women. Women, then, are expected to behave appropriately, in line with this essence. Women who sacrificially perform this national duty are sublimated, while those women who cross the boundaries are excluded. Besides these rather cultural and symbolic duties, women are active participants in national, economic, political, and military struggles (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989: 1-14).

- 19 Agreeing with the argument that national identity politics are waged over women's bodies, Deniz Kandiyoti states that for the same reason, women's place in nationalist state politics also carries with it indeterminacies and contradictions. While the pro-modernization elements in nationalist projects invite women to take part in the public sphere as equal citizens, women are also assigned the duty of being carriers of an untainted national culture, and the hazards of the 'modern' are sought within their changing behaviors. The latter, however, invalidates women's equal citizenship (Kandiyoti 1997: 14-15).
- 20 The sources of the problem concerning women's citizenship have been widely elaborated beyond nationalism studies and feminist theory and research. Carol Pateman (1998), who sought the problem's source in *contract theories* and in the distinction between the private and public spheres—one of the fundamental bases of bourgeois-liberal political thought—states that the social contract, which is assumed to have taken place among equal citizens in the public sphere, renders invisible the unequal contract between men and women in the private sphere. For Pateman, the social contract, which expresses the transition from the traditional world to the modern world, is a contract among brothers which replaces the traditional form of patriarchy based on the power of the father with a form of patriarchy based on the power of the brothers. Similar to Pateman, Sylvia Walby (1992) points out that a shift in patriarchy takes places with modernization from the private form of patriarchy where women are controlled at home to a public form of patriarchy.
- 21 It is possible to consider the conflicting articulation of women in nationalist movements in the context of nationalist movements' contradictory attitudes towards women and different forms of patriarchy. Partha Chatterjee (2000: 107) states that the anti-colonial nationalism in India tried to overcome such contradictions by constituting dichotomies such as spiritual versus material, home versus world, woman versus man. Since the material world outside was the world of the colonizer and of homogenizations, the place to conserve difference was the spiritual world and home. Women had to be the protectors and sustainers of this spiritual world, and at the same

time, they were prohibited from crossing the 'new patriarchal' boundaries when stepping into the public sphere as necessitated by modernization. This new patriarchy assigned women a duty to endorse new social responsibilities, and relegated 'women's liberation' and women to secondary status, a status which was new and legitimate (ibid.: 113).

- 22 Jayawardena's observation (1986: 14) points to the same contradiction when she states that nationalist reformers sought non-western indigenous support for women's equal status. In most of the Asian countries she examines, reformers reasoned that the present unequal social status of women was due to 'external' influence, and put forth the idea that women were 'essentially' more equal and free in their national culture. So while stressing a golden age, a distant past filled with the nation's 'cultural essence,' sources from within this culture are used to legitimate the equal status of women.
- 23 However, while women benefited from reforms, the accompanying dichotomies such as modern versus traditional, home versus public sphere, and woman versus man burdened women with invisible costs to be paid besides what women benefited from reforms, since reforms took place in company with dualities like modern and the traditional, or dichotomies like home versus public sphere, woman versus man. Post-colonial feminist researcher Abu-Lughod therefore questions the traditional/modern dichotomy and proposes that we be skeptical about the association of women's liberation with modernization, and that we draw attention to the invisible costs of modernity on women, and proposes to determine what these costs were. It is this problem that is traced in *Remaking Women* (1998), a book consisting of articles about the relationship between feminism, modernization and post-colonialism in the Middle East, scrutinizing once again the fundamental figures and institutions of the narrative on women's progress. In *Remaking Women* (Abu-Lughod 1998), she reveals the contradictions of bourgeois reform programs, which were related to the rational-scientific forms of government aiming to make women modern, especially with regard to education, marriage and raising children. At the same time she deciphers new forms of discipline and regulations brought about by the same reform programs. Supporting Kandiyoti's (1987) 'emancipated but unliberated' formulation, Abu-Lughod (1998: 256) argues that a new understanding of discipline accompanied the women's liberation movements. For her, bourgeois reformers' concerns, such as women's education, love marriages, and scientific child rearing, were closely related to this new understanding of discipline. Similarly, Sirman (2002: 233) argues that the 'new family' and 'new woman' were not only categories determined by new forms of power, but were structures that created power, helped power make sense, and enabled a particular configuration of power relations to take effect.
- 24 One of the consequences of the fact that national fictions and projects are accompanied by discourses on womanhood and family and of the fact that the new discourse on family is actually a new disciplinary mechanism for regulating society is that these discourses are simultaneously about love and affection. Sirman (2002), in analyzing the role of literature in the construction of Turkish national identity after the *Tanzimat* era and the founding of the Republic, demonstrates that love and affection occupy a central place in the transition from the empire, where the Sultan represented the father's authority over the whole society, to the founding of nation-state power. Referring to Abu-Lughod's research on Berbers in Egypt, Sirman argues that to define love or affection is to socially define the subject's emotions. Through this definition, the

subject is constituted as a whole and equipped with emotions. Love creates the subject by equipping her first with desires, and then with the duty to curb her desires. When seen in this perspective, the process of defining the concept of love can also be read as a process of defining the relations between sexes, sexuality, and subjectivity. Such a reading shows us that the process of curbing desire takes place on the axis of nation-family (Sirman 2002: 240).

- 25 Including desires and sexuality in the field of discussions about nationalism and gender is an occasion for reflecting on Anderson's (1991: 5) question of how nationalism successfully calls on people to die for the sake of the nation. Frantz Fanon (1965), who examines the psychological effects of colonizers on the colonized societies, asserted that the colonizers rendered the colonized men impotent and described the anti-colonial wars in terms of colonized men reclaiming their manhood. Cynthia Enloe similarly states that 'nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope' (2003: 79). The identification of the home land with the female body, imagined in many examples as a mother in tears, or as a lover wailing under the occupation of enemy men, is deeply effective for mobilizing men to die for the homeland. The statement '*vatan borcu namus borcudur*' (indebted to the homeland, indebted to *namus*), which identifies the homeland with the female body and codifies the duty to guard the homeland as a *namus* debt for the nation's men, could be read as an expression of such masculine imagination. Afsaneh Najmabadi (1997) identifies a similar analogy in the discourse of Iranian nationalism. Demonstrating that the discourse constructs the homeland as a female body through articulations between classical literature on love on the one hand and patriotic poetry on the other, Najmabadi indicates that this construction serves to formulate womanhood as a body in need of protection against foreign ambitions, harassment, and rape, thereby assigning nationalism the duty as the gatekeepers of *namus*. The construction of the homeland and its women as bodies in need of protection and possession by the nation's men has deepened the difference and inequality between male and female citizens.
- 26 Despite these critical observations of the contradictory articulations of women and nationalist movements one need not overlook the potentials residing in women's active participation. Although it is men who set the stage and write the scenarios, this does not necessarily mean that women are doomed to remain wholly passive elements in nationalist processes. As Chatterjee (2002) points out in her examination of the anti-colonial nationalism in India, women were active participants in the processes of nation-state building even when their voices were not heard, and even if women found themselves subjected to a new patriarchal order. That only men's voices were heard doesn't necessarily mean that there were no other voices.
- 27 Moreover, ethnic and national identities are collective constructs, just like any other collective identity. They never exhibit homogeneous, fixed qualities. Actors' struggles have the potential to change the content of these identities. Such potentials are especially present when women are not merely symbols of the ethnic and national fictions and projects, but are actors themselves.
- 28 Finally, it is important to take into account that nationalism is a field open to competition among different loci of power (Sirman 2002: 230), that class relations cannot be overlooked when analyzing the interaction between gender and projects based on national fictions, and that conflicts between ethnic and national groups

include various other conflicts between social hierarchies (Walby 2000: 31). The nationalist modernization projects analyzed in the aforementioned studies appeared, for the most part, as the struggles of local bourgeoisies aiming to establish their own domination against colonial power. As Walby highlights (*ibid.*: 34), even the most integrated ethnic/national group always harbors a system of social inequality in which the dominant group(s) establish their hegemony over the political project of the 'community' or its 'culture.' Therefore, it should be expected that different members of the group have different interests in the ethnic/national conflicts. Thus, parallel to the transformations within a particular nationalist movement, the movement's discourse on gender could also change.

## 2. The Post-1980 Kurdish Movement and the Factors behind the Discourse of Gender Equality

### 2.1. Conditions of emergence

- 29 The Kurdish rebellions of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were mostly led by Kurdish sovereigns, and were carried out through tribal relations, religious symbols playing an important role as mobilizing mechanisms (Olson 1989; Jwaideh 2006). The Kurdish movement that emerged in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, was different in that it emerged from within the impoverished parts of society that had undergone a process of proletarianization (McDowall 1997). Behind this change lay factors like modernization and the development of capitalism in Turkey, which also transformed the socioeconomic structure of Kurdish society.
- 30 After the suppression of the rebellions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Kurdish sovereigns, the spokesmen of the Kurdish opposition, were eliminated by the Turkish state. As David McDowall (1997) also emphasizes, the loyalty of the rest of the Kurdish elites was won through granting them various economic and political privileges. As a result, the Kurdish elites were removed from the Kurdish opposition's political field. The patronage relations that the state forged with the Kurdish elites made the state stronger while deepening poverty and class difference among Kurds. This, in turn, paved the way for the emergence of a new Kurdish opposition. From the 1950s onwards, with the capitalist development of agriculture in Turkey, landless peasants and agricultural workers were increasingly poor and separated from their lands. Peasants started thinking that the state and the local elites were the source of their poverty and the political pressure they experienced, and thus felt anger towards both parties.
- 31 When impoverished Kurdish youths who emigrated to the big cities to work or study encountered the left-wing youth movements, their anger was transformed into a left-leaning Kurdish opposition against both local elites and the state (Beşikçi 1992; Bruinessen 1992a). The role of the Turkish Labor Party (TİP) in this process cannot be overlooked. Besides pointing to the rural inequalities and the poverty of Kurds, the TİP also emphasized the oppression of Kurdish language and identity, arousing huge interest among the Kurds in a short period of time. The organizational activities of the TİP among Kurds were crucial in helping the impoverished Kurds consider themselves a potential political power (Ekinci 2001: 94-116). This was their primary political socialization, before they established separate political groups.

32 The Kurdish youth clustered in the big cities of Turkey did not form separate organizations at first. However, the military coup d'état on March 12<sup>th</sup> 1971 shut down TİP, dealing a big blow to the left-wing youth organizations and leading them to go underground, where they became more radical and conducted armed actions. In the late 1970s radicalized Kurdish groups started forming their own organizations with demands such as independence. One of these Kurdish organizations was the PKK, established in 1978 with the purpose of founding an independent socialist state. While the military coup d'état of September 12<sup>th</sup> 1980 crushed most of the radical organizations, the PKK managed to survive, and became, after September 12<sup>th</sup>, one of the important actors to take up the political agenda of Turkey's Kurds.

## 2.2. The political aims of the new Kurdish Movement

33 These socioeconomic changes in Turkey's Kurdish society did not only alter the class character of the Kurdish opposition, they also determined its ideological and political aims and mobilization strategies. Similar to the examples that Jayawardena (1986) examines, the new leftist, secular Kurdish movement foresaw a political project of internal reforms aiming to modernize Kurdish society for the purposes of struggling against the 'colonizer'; thus, the movement followed the modern/traditional dualism. The movement targeted both the Kurdish sovereign elites and the state, defining the latter as 'colonizers,' the former as 'comprador and feudal powers.' *Parti Programı* (Party Program), which was published by the PKK in 1978, clearly indicated that the national project of the movement did not include all Kurds. According to this program, a 'national democratic revolution' was to be realized under the leadership of the working class through an alliance between workers and peasants. Under the banner of proletarian internationalism, proletarian classes of the neighboring peoples and socialist states were allies of top priority, while large landowners and other local sovereigns were held responsible. The 'national' aspect of the national democratic revolution targeted the 'colonial system,' while the 'democratic' aspect targeted what was called the 'feudal comprador exploitation,' characterizing the kinship-based tribal structures and religious community relations as 'remainders of the Middle Ages' and therefore as barriers to the realization of social equality (quoted by İsmet 1993: 55-56). The unequal position of women was brought up in this context.

## 2.3. Mobilization strategies

34 Besides the ideological framework, the mobilization strategies of the movement also played a determining role in treating gender inequality as a problem to be resolved. The PKK's 'strategy of long-term people's war' also placed women's secondary and dependent position on the agenda as a practical problem. 'People's war' necessitated both the support and active participation of women. However, it was not very easy to mobilize women in the Kurdish society, where patriarchal attachments binding women were abundant. In addition, married men who saw their wives as their *namus* hesitated to abandon their wives and join the movement. For the mobilization strategy to be successful, therefore, the patriarchal barriers that tightly controlled and locked women at home had to be removed, and *namus*, defined as the control over women's sexuality, could no longer be an impediment.

- 35 This difficulty was especially felt in the rural areas in which the movement tried to find support in 1980s. It is in these years that Öcalan's 'analyses' increasingly criticized traditional patriarchal family structures, women's secondary status within the family, and the gender roles that associated women with *namus* and assigned men the duty to protect it. These critiques were later published with the title *Woman and Family Question* (Öcalan 1992a), and since they were circulated widely, they can be regarded as a fundamental source for our subject.<sup>10</sup>
- 36 In the *Woman and Family Question*, Öcalan articulates the critique of gender inequality and more generally of the family structures in which women are tightly controlled together with the critique of Kurdish sovereign classes. The use of definitions like 'old family' and 'old Kurdishness' is a conscious choice. For in this articulation, Öcalan argues that the patriarchal family structure and the inequalities it involves are in the interest of Kurdish sovereign classes, and that they are reproduced by them. In the book, it is stated that the Kurdish sovereign classes collaborate with the state, and do not allow the Kurds to become independent modern individuals by enforcing tribal relations, thereby hampering their social development.
- 37 Like the examples given in the first part, the analyses in the *Woman and Family Question* are about the modernization of the family and the emergence of the modern individual; they claim that the kinship-based tribal structures and the family structure are barriers for both individualization and the development of national sentiments and attachments. According to the analyses in the book, Kurds' horizon was limited to the patriarchal family because they were socially, politically, and economically oppressed as a result of an alliance between the 'colonizer' state and the comprador Kurdish sovereign classes. What should be done, then, was to get rid of familial attachments. Thus, in the *Woman and Family Question*, there are repeated calls to abandon the family. As will be seen later, it was claimed that this was the only way to create 'new (and free) Kurdishness.'
- 38 One of the fundamental conditions for men and women to get rid of their familial attachments was to eliminate the *namus* barrier. Concomitantly, at the heart of the critique of family was the critique of the relations between men and women in which the men's *namus* hinges on women's body and sexuality:
- Since sexual motives are fundamental instincts, the problems thus created lead to profound political perversions. To resolve the sexual motives is to realize the greatest revolution. There is no one among us who has not yet realized this. Everyone succumbs. Kurdish society expresses an individual type and a social reality, which succumbs, more than any other society in the world, to instincts of hunger and sexuality. [...] Around these sexual motives are formed a certain *namus*, a certain understanding of morality, and no brave fellows have the power to overcome this. [...] In this bottleneck, our individual has lost once again, even before it reached the age of twenty. (Öcalan 1999: 19)
- 39 The analyses state that the family structure locks up women in the house, renders her dependent on men, makes a fetish of *namus*, and *pulls women down*.<sup>11</sup> Loving and marrying such women is a trap for men because women will not hesitate to use their state of *being-pulled-down* as a means to *pull down* men. As will be seen in the example below, the idea that the more women are *pulled down* they will *pull men down* as well, served, above all, to keep male militants away from women and familial attachments.
- Woman is like a slave, weak, and too unequipped and dangerous. [...] That is, she craftily uses her own state of *being-pulled-down* in order to pull down the whole

society. These are questions that we need to be careful about when we go into the process of national liberation. [...] The reason why most of you are inadequately revolutionized is the relationships that you established with the woman reality. The fundamental measures of resistance or the fundamental measures of socialism are left aside in the process of developing emotions; instead, relationships were developed, which can lead to slavery. Don't you know that a relationship with a woman, into which you were plotted, is a trap? The enemy uses this so well. (Öcalan 1992a: 106)

- 40 The *analyses* also characterize women as 'slaves of slaves,' stating that women as a sex are subject to a second-degree enslavement in Kurdish society, which is itself enslaved by external powers and their local compradors. In addition to evaluating women's condition, such characterizations also served a function in the PKK's mobilization strategies. It was expected that by removing the barriers which keep women home and thereby liberating women from servitude, women would leave home to join the Kurdish movement and would play an important role in the dissolution of the wider condition of servitude in which Kurds were trapped.

Women's liberation is Kurdistan's liberation; it is even the men's liberation. It seems to me that men's relation to women is similar to that of an occupier. ... The level of women's freedom is also the level of society's freedom; that, in turn, is the country's freedom. (Öcalan 1999: 27)

- 41 In the first analysis quoted above, men are asked to keep away from women, while the second analysis brings up the question of women being liberated. As will be seen below, it was suggested, in this way, that men should relate to women not on the basis of marriage and love, but on the basis of 'liberating women.'

## 2.4. The discourse of 'liberating women' in the 1980s

Millions of women are left on their own (*sahipsiz*), are in a deadly situation, bound with innumerable bonds of servitude. Shatter those bonds, liberate women, let women become a flood and fall like a waterfall. In our society, women are killed. The first thing for you to do is to find the bonds that bind women, and slash them. (Öcalan 1992a: 101-102)

- 42 The quote above can be evaluated as an expression of the fact that efforts to mobilize society had as their primary aim the 'liberation' of women and the slashing of the bonds binding women. It was thought that the multiple oppressions women were exposed to would make women more sensible and easier to mobilize. Also, as can be seen in the quote below, it was anticipated that women could be effective in improving public relations.

It can be said that women experience the extremes of all forms of oppression and exploitation. [...] Women are a *ground* that can be greatly developed in the future, a *ground* on which the National Liberation Struggle could depend, in the condition that they are treated and organized. (Öcalan 1992a: 52-53) (*italics my emphasis*)

- 43 Another expectation that played a role in mobilizing women was concerned with creating a public opinion. The interest aroused by the Palestinian *intifada* in the global public opinion, in particular, strikingly showed the role that women can play in demonstrations:

Today, during the Palestinian uprising, it is almost entirely women, children, and the youth with stones who carry out the revolution. There are lessons to take from this. [...] When women, who make up half of the society, take to the streets, it is impossible to control them [...]. In this respect, especially for improving the urban

movement, we must take action in this next stage. [...] Certainly, all women are furious. All of them are hungry and impoverished. It is possible to make them into rebels by using all kinds of methods. (Öcalan 1992a: 101-102, 253)

- 44 It is clear that this discourse, in which the women are defined as *instruments* and as a *ground*, is an expression of an instrumental approach towards 'women's liberation' in line with the mobilization strategy. On the other hand, it also verifies Chatterjee's (2000) observation that women do not speak within nationalist discourses, but are spoken about. The language that is used here codifies the man as both the addressor and the addressee. Woman is the object of speech. In the next section, we will evaluate the effects that the change in the gender composition of movement had on this language, in particular the entrance of women into dialogue as actors. But before discussing this, it is useful to turn to the question of how *namus*, one of the biggest barriers to women's participation in the movement as actors, was eliminated through a discursive operation.

## 2.5. The redefinition of *namus*: from the female body to the homeland as a whole

- 45 As indicated above, the critique of what Öcalan characterizes as the 'old family' involves at the same time a redefinition of *namus*, which used to be defined through the female body. This critique was mainly concerned with redefining *namus* by shifting the fields of signification. Analyses of *namus* pointed to a new field on which it was to be defined:

Men seek complete dominion in sexuality. [...] Women, on the other hand, use sexuality as their greatest weapon for keeping hold of men. [...] This is where sexuality leads to a dangerous notion of *namus* - [...] and since this is our fundamental moral norm, it has very dangerous consequences. The homeland is under occupation, the homeland is raped thousands of times, but nothing is done in return; not even a single sentiment of *namus* or honor. (Öcalan 1992a: 136-137)

- 46 Öcalan here points out to men that 'homeland' is the primary field within which *namus* and honor are to be protected. However, at the same time he emphasizes that seeing *namus* as the control over the female body and sexuality has 'dangerous consequences'; that this notion leads to insensitivity in the face of 'homeland being raped.' That is, in addition to pointing to the new and privileged field of signification, Öcalan highlights that focusing on the old definition, on controlling the female body, prevents Kurds from fulfilling their responsibilities for the privileged field. In this way, the shift in *namus*'s field of signification from the female body to the homeland calls men to fight 'for the homeland' in order to protect their *namus* and honor and, at the same time, serves to remove the *namus* barrier preventing women's participation in the same fight.
- 47 It is certainly true that a relationship of identity is forged here between the female body and the 'homeland,' a relationship which, as Najmabadi (1997) remarks, is inherent in nationalism. In this sense, one can argue that women are codified as objects in need of protection, and that this serves to reproduce the patriarchal control over women. However, one must not overlook the importance of this shift in signifying *namus*, especially with regard to women's freedom of movement, for it enabled women to leave home. And it is worth remembering that women leaving home might have unforeseeable consequences.

### 3. Women's Participation in 1990s and the Effects of this Participation on the Kurdish Movement's Discourse

#### 3.1. Women's participation

- 48 The efforts of the Kurdish movement to remove patriarchal barriers locking women at home produced results by the end of 1980s. Women started appearing in meetings and at street demonstrations in which political demands of Kurds were articulated. In addition to the ideological propaganda of the Kurdish movement, extraordinary oppression by the security forces, destruction and evacuation of villages, human rights violations, detentions and arrests were also effective in prompting women to join political demonstrations (Çağlayan 2007).
- 49 The movement's Kurdish identity-based politicization and the conflict in the region eventually reached the scope of a civil conflict, killing thousands and causing more than a million Kurds to leave their villages and immigrate to big cities; as a consequence, in the beginning of 1990s, there appeared extended mass demonstrations called *serhildan*<sup>12</sup>, named after the Palestinian intifada.
- 50 The *Newroz* celebrations of 1990, 1991, and 1992 are of crucial importance in that they exposed people to direct confrontation with the security forces. For the Kurdish movement these demonstrations, in which women participated and made their presence felt *en masse*, were occasions to make its presence and strength felt. Women's participation had repercussions in the public opinion. The harsh responses by the security forces and the death of many demonstrators as a result of gunfire led to new demonstrations, and to more civilian deaths, including those of women.<sup>13</sup> Even if there was no more violence and tension in the following years' demonstrations, *Newroz* activities kept being an important field with regards to the political visibility of women.
- 51 Yet women's participation was not limited to such street demonstrations and *Newroz* activities. In the beginning of 1990s, many women from the villages and from among the university students in big cities went up to the mountains to become 'fighters,' to join the armed forces of the movement. Women's participation reached such a scope that it effected the overall gender composition of the movement's militants. It has been said that one third of the militants were women in these years (Özcan 1999).
- 52 Women's presence in the harsh condition of the mountains, generally believed to fit men better than women, was limited neither to 'rear guard support' nor to auxiliary positions. Once again, women took part in what was thought to be appropriate only for men. As Lale Yalçın Heckman and P. Van Gelder (2000: 313-318) also observe, in these years, women guerrillas in the mountains were the most popular images circulated in order to call Kurds to join the movement. The fact that young women died in armed confrontations was also an emotional factor for politically mobilizing society. Epic songs about young women who either died in armed clashes or were famous for their political efforts became popular among the people.
- 53 It can be argued that the extensive two-month-long clashes in 1992, named the 'Southern War' in the movement's terminology, was influential in that women combated for the 'homeland' side by side with men, proving themselves in the field.<sup>14</sup>

- 54 Women militants and sympathizers described the purpose of their participation in Newroz demonstrations in the early 1990s as ‘protesting the oppression of Kurds,’ and attracted public attention through suicide protests in which they set fire to themselves. The suicides implied a call to ‘sacrifice oneself for freedom’ which referred to the Newroz bonfire flaring for freedom in the myth of Kawa the Blacksmith. In fact, women were not the first to commit suicides during Newroz. One of the founders of the PKK, Mazlum Doğan, committed suicide in order to protest the oppression in Diyarbakır Prison No. 5 following the military coup d’état on September 12; Doğan also chose Newroz, March 21<sup>st</sup>, as the date for his suicide. The day he had chosen was associated with the myth of the Kawa the Blacksmith, the constitutive myth of Kurdishness, and Mazlum Doğan was consequently declared the ‘Modern Kawa.’<sup>15</sup> In this way, the importance of the myth of Kawa the Blacksmith for the political constitution of Kurdish identity was solidified once more, allowing the movement to establish itself as the contemporary representative of the Kurdish struggle from the ancient past to the present and to make calls for self-sacrifice. The women who set themselves on fire in the 1990s were responding to this call.
- 55 A suicide protest carried out in 1995 by a woman militant with the code name Zilan was a turning point in terms of both its style and its consequences. It was different in terms of style because Zilan’s operation was not limited to annihilating herself, but led to the death of numerous soldiers; it was different in terms of its consequences because it became the origin for the *invention* of a new constitutive myth, which was very different than the myth of Kawa: The new myth assigned the liberators’ mission to women.
- 56 Women’s increased visibility in various fields of the Kurdish movement was also reflected in the political parties based on Kurdish identity that were established legally. Leyla Zana was the first popular example of a woman participating in this field, but many others were nominated and elected in local and national elections. Pro-Kurdish parties had the largest number of nominated and elected women both in local and parliamentary elections.<sup>16</sup> As Metin Yüksel (2006) emphasizes, they were able to articulate their demands simultaneously as Kurds and as women.

### 3.2. The effects of women’s participation and the discourse of ‘the woman who liberates herself while also liberating society’

- 57 Women’s extensive participation in demonstrations affected the Kurdish movement’s ideological and political discourse. Even if the addressor of the discourse remained the same,<sup>17</sup> the addressee was no longer limited to male militants like it had been in the 1980s. It was not only men who fought for the ‘homeland’ and lost their lives; now there were also women among the guerillas, in numbers that could no longer be underestimated. This situation factually invalidated the earlier discourse, which had reduced women to objects waiting to be liberated.<sup>18</sup> Parallel to this, starting from the mid-1990s, especially after the *Southern War*<sup>19</sup> in 1992, one observes that the image of the ‘pulling-down woman’ was substituted, to a large extent, with the image of the ‘trustworthy woman.’
- 58 The impact on the movement was not limited to the register of ideological political discourse; it also gave rise to an organizational change in which women were encouraged to form their own independent political and military units without male

commanders in order to fulfill their duties to ‘fight for and liberate the homeland.’ Although military service is an activity associated with manhood, the movement’s ideological attitude did not allow this situation to impede women’s participation in armed units. Yuval-Davis (2003: 189-190) states that even if military service is generally associated with men, a strong ideological stance may help overcome some tensions, especially in contexts where the national liberation army is less formal in terms of hierarchy and organizational structure and when women’s liberation stands for the liberation of the entire people. Öcalan’s evaluation below simultaneously illustrates the tensions and takes an ideological stance against them:

It may be difficult, but women joining the army means taking the most radical step to equality and freedom. If we can’t be as great as the situation demands, we will finish ourselves off. Because no army has ever done so. If we do this, the radical solution will follow. That is, not only as an instrument of war, not even for a liberation personality, but to achieve a living personality. (Öcalan 1999: 176)

- 59 Attempts in this respect gave rise to what in the movement is called ‘women army-fication’ (*ordulaşma*). As can be seen in the quote below, this fact was associated with the movement’s ideological framework of gender equality:

The one who has an army oppresses. There is no concept such as an army of equality. Where there is equality, there are no armies. Armies appear where there is inequality; one is the oppressor’s army, the other is the army of the oppressed. If, somewhere, there are only men’s armies, this means that the reality of oppressed women is in question. Life vindicates us. As such we should see and know that women army-fication expresses a fundamental value for equality. (Esen 2002: 13)<sup>20</sup>

- 60 These statements, in which Öcalan points to women army-fication as fundamental means of equality, was followed by the call to reorganize the relations between men and women on the basis of equality. In the 1980s, Öcalan spoke to militant men about how they should treat women, that is, he spoke with men about women; in the 1990s, however, he spoke with women militants about men, and drew attention to the significance of this:

Man at hand was analyzed, and it was seen that man is the main problem. [...] For me, the Man Question is now prior to the Woman Question. Does being man equals being in power? I ask men: If you have power, then why can’t you show this in the most elementary problem of war? He proves his manhood by domination over women, in sexual domination. This is a dominion of crude power; I found it foul, and I shattered it. (Öcalan 1999: 30)

Don’t seek support in the magical hands of men. Stand on your feet, hang on to life with your hands. (Öcalan 1999: 138)

We don’t conduct these analyses of men for nothing. Especially when it is the Kurdish men in question, especially when this man is a member of the Party, these analyses should be conducted in a reliable manner. Unless you analyze men, your life is definitely in danger. You should analyze thoroughly, scientifically. You must question. (Öcalan 1999: 82)

- 61 In these analyses, Öcalan called on women to think about the ‘what kind of man?’ question. The ‘what kind of man?’ question can be interpreted as an inversion of the ‘what kind of woman?’ question, which was, as emphasized in the first part, raised from the late-19th century onwards, almost exclusively by pro-modernization, reformist, nationalist men:

The “what kind of man” question is a poignant one for you. The search for a man who will not oppress you physically or emotionally is important. [...] you should be prominent and contentious advocates of a right life. That is, you should take sides; don’t adjust yourself according to me or to men; adjust yourself according to

yourself. Be healthy, be free: Do whatever you need to do for self-determination as a sex. (Öcalan 2000: 97, 120)

62 Nevertheless, like in other similar contexts, women's position was not independent from the ideal 'new society' that the movement intended to establish. The movement regarded and presented its own organizational structure and organizational relations as a prototype of the ideal society that it wants to establish:

We want to build a new society. Let's realize this new society, equality, freedom, esteem, and love among ourselves first. (Öcalan 2000: 104-105)

63 As mentioned before, the anti-colonial nationalist movements' ideals of a 'new society' correspond more or less to the new society that the bourgeoisie wants to establish along the lines of a new notion of discipline. Parallel to this we have seen that many constructions and regulations were actualized within a discourse of 'women's liberation.' What did the new society correspond to in our case, and how was it related to women's liberation? First of all, it must be stated that women's equal participation in the movement and right to self-determination were interpreted as signifiers of the new society. There were intense debates on this topic within the Kurdish movement in the period between 1993 and 1996; conferences were organized and organizational experiments carried out. As a result of such efforts, concepts like 'women's social contract' and 'women's renaissance' emerged alongside specific ideological texts like 'women's liberation ideology.'<sup>21</sup>

64 The concept of 'women's social contract,' the development of which recalls Pateman's (1998) denouncement of *contract theories* as a contract among brothers, pointed towards a new social organization in which women were subjects rather than objects. According to the concept, women were advised to question their relations both with men and with society, and to redefine these relations in a way that would make them equal (Serok 2001).<sup>22</sup> In the discussion texts, published under the title *Women's Social Contract* (Serok 2001: 5), such a process of questioning and redefining would lead to a 'women's renaissance,' and this would inverse the relationship of 'slaves of slaves,' paving the way for the enlightenment of the entire society. The principles of the women's renaissance were defined in the women's liberation ideology. Although it was defined as women's liberation ideology, in the context of women's liberation, we should state that the listed principles did not bind women only; they were binding for men as well, setting forth firm conditions for them. In this sense, it can be stated that women's liberation ideology is the first text in which women set forth binding conditions for men to abide by. When we consider that it is usually men who set the conditions for women in ethnic-national processes, it is remarkable that women here set binding principles for men, even if these principles were limited to the movement's own sphere of influence and to its own organizational structure. On the other hand, both for women and men the aforementioned principles involved, as their most important emphasis, the principle to 'be faithful to the homeland and fight for it.' The purpose of this emphasis is obvious when we consider that these principles were determined in the context of an ongoing process of political mobilization. Another principle of fundamental importance for our topic is that women were to be independent from men and men were to avoid establishing patriarchal dominance over women. An important step en route to realizing these principles was the establishment of a separate women's party in 1999 (Akkaya and Jongerden 2010).

### 3.3. The gender matrix of the new Kurdish identity

65 The discourse of the Kurdish movement on the new society can also be read as a discourse about the construction of Kurdish identity. We can argue in this context that during 1990s, this discourse was shaped not only by the aforementioned desire to modernize, but also by the changing profile of actors during the process of political mobilization in this decade. As can be remembered, the narrative of Kurdishness, which was determined by the mobilization strategy of 1980s and by the movement's ideological structure, was accompanied by dualisms like the 'old (and pulled-down)' versus 'new,' or 'remnants of Medieval/traditional' versus 'modern' and 'free'; above all, it was shaped around a critique of the patriarchal family, which was associated with the 'old,' and around the critique of men's and women's roles within this family.

66 This 'new' and modern Kurdishness also appeared as a narrative about the family, about manhood and womanhood. The conditions for the new society and Kurdish identity provided new codes to define the 'new woman' and the 'new man' in line with the political aims and contemporary mobilization strategies of the movement. The mediation that constituted the signifiatory framework was *love*, parallel to Sirman's (2002) argument that the nation-family axis becomes the milestone on which love, affection and desires are curbed. Öcalan's analyses titled *Kurdish Love*, published in 1999, highlighted that the new family (the big family or the new Kurdishness), new woman, and the new man will be products of a struggle for deserving love, and of success in this struggle. Success in this struggle was necessary for getting rid of the curse of the 'old' and reaching the esteem promised by the 'new woman' and 'new man.' The new woman, who would be the founder of the new society, was not just any woman:

When I say "woman must be trusted," I refer to a woman who has owned her identity, has become herself before anything else, has enlivened herself, has taught others how to live with the proper power to govern and organize, the woman with her valuable approaches; this is the free Woman I know. There is no need hold back from this woman. Some regard such women dangerous. On the contrary, I adore such women. (Öcalan 1999: 85-86)

67 The duties and responsibilities, and the promises of the new woman and new man were briefly expressed as the 'love-victory dialectics':

Associate love with victory, victory with love. This is the dialectics of the Kurdish resurrection, of the Kurdish liberation. (Öcalan 1999: 84)

Love is homeland. Love means freedom in the homeland, definite success in the organization. Love is struggle. Love means victory in struggle. (Öcalan 1999: 180)

68 The *analyses* emphasized that the condition for love was freedom. What was meant by freedom, on the other hand, was the liberation of the 'homeland' from external enemies and from the 'feudal compradors, who are remnants of the Middle Ages.' Therefore, the condition for love was to substitute 'love for the homeland' for sexual love:

Love that doesn't melt within the larger political organizational event constitutes a problem. [...] to love on the right basis is a work of great justice, great beauty, great effort and great victory. One who doesn't provide these cannot love. Love without carrying the organization forward, without improving all kinds of actions, without a strong character is turpitude. [...] I am saying that love of those who are focused on victory is valuable. Love has to be entirely focused on politics and on the march to victory. (Öcalan 1999: 27)

69 All these expressions circulated widely alongside the equation ‘who fights becomes free, who is free becomes beautiful, who becomes beautiful is loved’ (Öcalan 1999: 28). Consequently, such mediation functioned to call men and women to liberate the ‘homeland’ in order to deserve to be loved, and this mediation made possible the redefinition of ‘revolution’ as ‘revolution of love.’ Love remained an abstract target, an ideal, the definite condition of which was tightly associated with ‘liberating the homeland.’ All love outside this ideal was, as defined in the quote above, a ‘problem.’ Therefore, relations of love and affection without love for the homeland meant transgressing the boundaries of subject positions provided to women, and the transgression of the esteem provided by the positions of ‘new woman’ and ‘new man.’ At the same time, it pointed to the limits of the transformation in the notion of *namus* allowing women to leave homes, bringing new forms of control over women stepping out to the public sphere.

### 3.4. Invention of tradition

70 The discourse of *becoming-goddess* which developed after Zilan’s suicide action in 1995 assigned women the mission to constitute ‘new Kurdishness’ by referring to the cult of the goddess. Besides calling women (and men) to self-sacrificial struggle, this discourse was also functional in terms of the PKK’s change of strategy in 1993. Declaring a ceasefire in 1993, the PKK abandoned the thesis of a separate state, as well as other objectives such as a national democratic revolution and alliance with the proletariat of neighboring countries, objectives which were part of the first party program (İmset 1993). Besides the critique of ‘real socialism,’ political categories such as class, state, and the dictatorship of the proletariat were abandoned, and were replaced by cultural categories like ideology and morals; the progressive notion of history was also criticized.<sup>23</sup> The space opened up by these changes in the ideological register was beginning to be filled by a new discourse built with new concepts and categories. Parallel to the abandonment of the separate state thesis, the thesis of ‘struggle for freedom, not for power’ was put forth, a thesis which can be interpreted as a hegemonic struggle in civil society. Women were to be the subjects of this struggle.<sup>24</sup> The risk of getting stuck with a narrow nationalism as a result of abandoning the classical Marxist framework was eliminated by prioritizing the discourses of ‘women’s liberation’ and ‘women’s liberating mission.’ The ‘proletariat internationalism’ adopted in the first program had now lost its actuality; and, the lack of universalism, a result of abandoning this notion, was then made up for with the universalism of ‘women’s liberation.’

71 During the process when the ideological framework was being redefined, the symbolic role of women also underwent a transformation. The sources for this redefinition were found in the ancient past when states first originated, in the symbiotic relationship between state power and patriarchal domination. Accordingly, women had more reasons than men for struggling against patriarchy, and historically had greater revolutionary potential.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it became possible to construct the mythological golden age of Kurds as a matrilineal rural society in the Neolithic age. It was discovered that Kurds contributed to the development of ancient civilization within a matrilineal social formation in which women were the main actors:

History starts with the Sumerians, but it is said that the Sumerian civilization was actually nourished by the Mesopotamian civilization. Compared to the 500-year-

long capitalist civilization of Europe, this is a much more rooted history of civilization. All of the values and cultures of civilization spread out from Upper Mesopotamia, and from the inner arch of the Taurus-Zagros system. [...] We possess the fundamentals of humanity. (Öcalan 2001: 16, 18).

What underlies sacredness is food. [...] What underlies food is mothers' labor. She is the creator, the inventor, and the nurturer. [...] she works solely on production; she knows it; she sustains humanity through it. That is how she understands humanity. The mother's humanity, the woman's humanity means this. This is a notion of humanity that means sacred humanity. [...] The mother of these gods is the mother goddess. (Öcalan 2001: 21)

[In Mesopotamia] the first celestial symbols do not have the shape of men, but of women. Structures of femininity are dominant in the linguistic structure. This is why the first women goddesses, symbolized by stars, are called "sterk," that is stars: These are remnants of this era. (Öcalan 2001: 13)

- 72 The foundations for this 'discovery' was, as mentioned in the beginning of the paper, created by referring to the connection between the Ishtar the Goddess and the Kurdish word *sterk*, star:

When we came to Mesopotamia, the lands, which are the symbols of plenitude, were the lands between the Euphrates and Tigris. [...] Production developed with the unity of land and woman. In the history of humanity, Mesopotamia is the best-known and proven example of the realization of primitive communal society. That is, it is revealed that this society was shaped between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Animals were domesticated, seeded plants were cultivated, and women did the majority of these jobs. Ishtar was the goddess of this culture. [...] For me, Ishtar is *Star*. In fact, *Star* in Kurdish is *Sterk*. *Star* means star in the European languages. The origins of the word are Kurdish, from Mesopotamia. (Öcalan 1999: 134-135)

The greatest women originated from these lands, namely from Mesopotamia. We are their followers. We are in an amorous movement going back in history. [...] The goddess of love, the center for civilization is Mesopotamia. (Öcalan 1999: 189)

- 73 The only element missing in this construction was a symbol like the 'Modern Kawa,' which could be associated with Ishtar, completing the connection between the Neolithic golden age and our present day. Zilan became nothing less than this symbol after her suicide action. Parallel to Ishtar being one of the pivotal symbols of the Neolithic revolution, Zilan was characterized as the 'freedom goddess of the modern age' and the founder of the new society. Zilan's action was sublimated also as the realization of the 'love-victory' dialectics:

Zilan is a love. ... A realization of love. ... Living big, loving big. Fighting big. These are tightly connected. If it becomes actualized, love will develop and be respected. [...] our great politics is our great love. [...] It is a search for a definite life. It is an enormous will to "freedom." It is a reaction against life under the existing order. [...] Her action is, at the same time, a great blow to the life in force. It is a blow to the classical relationship between women and men. Women-men, marriage, sexuality, love, emotions: it is a blow to all of these. (Öcalan 1999: 28, 97)

- 74 Zilan's action, besides showing the necessary thresholds for the 'new manhood,' also pointed to the conditions for women to be loved:

When Zilan's identity was revealed, old manhood was entirely dead. (Öcalan 1999: 108)

[Zilan] also reveals very clearly how the beautiful woman will be actualized. (Öcalan 1999: 40)

- 75 On the other hand, it is clear in these kinds of analyses that the real-life consequences of the constitutive mission symbolically given to women is to become goddesses; in

other words, to follow Zilan's path and undertake sacrificial acts to the degree of giving up life. Assigning a constitutive role to women was strictly predicated upon the successful realization of expected duties and victories.

Everything's realization depends on this victory; great action will generate great life. (Öcalan 1999: 108)

#### 4. Natural Contradictions of the Identity Discourse: Limits and Possibilities

76 The first part of this article discussed contradictions in national fictions from the perspective of women. If we look at these contradictions more closely, we see at the one hand that women are assigned a constituting mission and at the other hand that women are asked to become goddesses, and that new (and respected) boundaries of female identity are closely associated with the refusal of any other love than the love of the homeland. The contradiction here is not identical to the contradiction of bourgeois reform programs that was defined in the first part of the paper. The reason for this is that the contradiction does not belong to a bourgeois class in search of new power, but is related to the left-wing ideological attitudes and the mobilizing strategy of a movement, defining itself on the bases of equality of ethnic identity and demands for freedom.

77 On the other hand, it must be noted that the contradiction is not limited to this. The characterization of Kurds as a 'womanized people,' which one encounters in the analyses and other ideological texts of the movement, can also be seen as one of the paradoxes of the discourse of Kurdish identity, a discourse which constitutes women as active subjects. The critique of the 'old man' was aimed at the man's position of patriarchal despot in the family. In an interview, Öcalan talked about the necessity of killing this form of manhood:

Killing the man is, actually, the fundamental principle of socialism. It is to kill power, to kill one-sided domination. (Quoted in Sayın 1998: 61)

78 'Killing the man' could, at first sight, be evaluated as radical discourse aimed at the dissolution of patriarchy. However, on closer examination it is possible to see that the same discourse has the potential to reproduce gender hierarchies. For the man to be killed was defined as a 'false' man, a manhood which, it was claimed, actually 'womanized' man:

In fact, womanhood is not merely a sexual concept. Historically we see that a woman, when torn apart from social, political, and especially military fields, becomes a wife. That is, womanhood is actually the product of social and political development. [...] The Kurdish man, just as he is withheld from political and military development, is also the servant and comprador for others. In fact, a woman is a comprador for man, too. But man is a comprador for another sovereign nation, a comprador of a sovereign class, much worse than the woman is. (Esen 2002: 10-11<sup>26</sup>)

79 The characterizations above involve different meanings and implications. In a way, similar to Fanon's (1965) call for colonized men to reclaim their manhood, they could be interpreted as an implied call for men to reclaim their manhood in war. As Cynthia Enloe also emphasizes, these types of perspectives have not only legitimized the extremely macho styles of many anti-colonial and black power movements; they have also legitimized the secondary status of women within national communities. Even if

the critique of 'false manhood' impeded the legitimization of a similar macho style, it cannot be overlooked that it summons men to achieve 'real power' in place of their false power over women. Thus, Öcalan, in the same interview quoted above, states:

I'm asking the men: do you want to be a man? If you want to be a real man, I have some conditions for you. You shall not boast in front of miserable wives. (Quoted in Sayın 1998: 366-367)

- 80 It is as if men kept their place in the gender hierarchy, while only the conditions changed:

Would we have come to this situation if men were real men? [...] We see so much bullying, but the same man is much worse than a woman when it comes to the fundamental values. Is his bullying of any value? (Öcalan 2000: 144-145)

- 81 Öcalan's autobiography, which he developed as a method of sociological and political analysis, is structured upon a narrative of 'reaching victory by giving up false manhood.' As in the example below, in many of his evaluations, one observes that 'giving up false manhood' is defined as the way to rescue real manhood:

Now, there are two types of Kurds: First, those who have lost their valor [...]. These are castrated Kurds, and they are many in numbers. Stay away from the castrated Kurds, and try to identify who they are. Then there are those who are loyal to the land, to their country, to their people. [...] This is why I renounced manhood. Why, because they wanted to castrate me. I told them that I resigned from my manhood. (Öcalan 1999: 186-187)

- 82 The statement 'I avoided being castrated by resigning from manhood' implies a success in being a real man. Therefore, even if this language criticizes being 'macho,' one can say that it is still a gendered language.

- 83 Finally, one needs to specify to whom this language belongs. As indicated above, this language belongs to Öcalan. It is a language which has been defining, classifying, inviting and excluding from 1978, when the PKK was founded, to 1999. How to evaluate the fact that it is a male leader who invites women to participate, to become liberated, to answer the question 'what kind of man,' and to take on the role of constituting the new society and the new Kurdish identity? First of all, one needs to state that the position of the inviter does not transform him into a 'nation-founding patriarchal father' figure, contrary to the examples in similar contexts. The ideological discourse of the movement harbors an imagination of a community of equal citizens — an expression of the egalitarian and pro-modernization desires — rather than a founding father figure. Yet, the leader still enjoys a unique place in relation to the 'community of equal citizens.' Terms such as 'Party Leadership' or the 'Presidency,' which Öcalan uses in reference to himself, and which is unquestionably accepted by the militants, help construct him as an institution beyond his being as a person. This has certain consequences with regard to gender relations. The discourse that constructs Öcalan as an institution rather than a person harbors androgynous qualities, placing the 'Party Leadership' at an equal distance to both men and women; more precisely, it has a transcendental position with regards to both. Thus, the main themes of the founding narrative of the leader consist of 'killing the man' and 'overcoming the traditional woman who pulls down.' Both men and women within the given society are already defeated in relation to this institution.

## Conclusion

- 84 This article has analyzed the ideological discourse of the Kurdish movement in the 1980s and 1990s and the construction of Kurdish identity in the light of feminist studies, which show that ethnic national fictions and projects are constructed in gendered ways.
- 85 Although the Kurdish movement later renounced the goal of founding a separate state, the movement after 1980 had features in common with the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century pro-modernization, anti-colonial national movements in terms both of its Kurdish identity-based political aims and its mobilizing strategy. We see, for example, a struggle against local 'feudal' compradors — defined as 'remnants of the Middle Ages' — as a necessary part of the struggle against the 'colonizer.' Similarly, 'women's liberation' is placed at the heart of modernization.
- 86 On the other hand, one observes differences as well. In early 20<sup>th</sup>-century anti-colonial movements, the burden to represent the new and modern society was imposed on women as a precondition for taking part in the public sphere. Yet, women were also assigned the duty to protect the authentic 'essence' of national culture, to transmit this culture to new generations, and to act as boundary markers. In the Kurdish movement, however, one does not observe similar contradictions arising from this dual signification. Within the ideological discourse of the Kurdish movement, Kurdish women do not come to the fore as carriers and transmitters of the authentic essence of Kurdish culture. On the contrary, they are invited to leave their homes and become active participants. In this sense, they are not 'wives and children' to be protected by the male members of the nation, unlike in Enloe's (2006) analysis. They are invited to work alongside men to protect the homeland and construct the new society. Therefore, the problems concerning women's citizenship mentioned in the first part of the paper are not reproduced in the Kurdish context. On the contrary, at least on the ideological-political discursive register, women's active citizenship is emphasized using concepts such as 'women's social contract.' Thus, we can argue that women have become participants in the masculine discourse of nation building — keeping in mind that they were primarily invited by the leader — and that this was possible due to the left-wing ideological-political framework of the movement, to the mobilization strategies requiring women's participation, and to the women's participation itself.
- 87 Like many other national narratives of identity, the narrative of Kurdish identity is also a narrative about family, womanhood, manhood, and thus about love and affection. However, there is a differentiation from national fictions based on the analogy between family and nation. While defining the patriarchal family and values as 'the other' of new Kurdishness, the critique of the old family and the old man prevents the new Kurdishness from being imagined as an extended patriarchal family; also, since the new identity is not defined in relation to an ethnic/national other, it can be more permeable. While on the practical level the critique of the patriarchal value system liberates women from the familial control by men, on the level of ideological construction, it enables women to become equal subjects.
- 88 However, from a gender perspective, the discursive transformation still involves contradictions. For example, the passage towards becoming constitutive subjects is not open to all women, but only to women who satisfy certain requirements. Women are asked to desexualize themselves when entering the public sphere much as they are in

other anti-colonial pro-modernization national movements. Respectable participation in the public sphere is strictly predicated upon an amorous attachment to the homeland, and to fighting for it. Substituting sexual love for the love for the homeland is enough reason to be excluded from the 'liberated' and 'trustworthy' female identity and being labeled as 'woman who pulls down.' Therefore, the same discourse that enables women to leave their homes by overcoming the *namus* barrier also establishes a new patriarchal control in the public sphere. In Walby's (1992) words, a shift happens from the private form of patriarchy to its public form.

- 89 In conclusion, it can be said that we are facing a discourse of national identity which has multiple surfaces and meanings, and which is being continuously constructed. This field of multiple meanings and contradictions could possibly lead to positive results, as Kandiyoti also states in her examination, as a consequence of active struggle by the actors. Although the Kurdish movement's ideological discourse harbors many of the contradictions that are generally found in ethnic-national narratives and discourses, it has created the possibility for women to engage in struggle against these contradictions by enabling them to leave their homes. It is only women's active struggle that can determine which meanings will be fixed and which meanings will not.

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## NOTES

1. For the emergence of the Kurdish movement in Post-1980 Turkey and Turkey's 'Kurdish Question' see Kirişçi and Minrov 1997, İmset, 1993, and Casier and Jongerden 2010.
2. For a successful study of the Kurdish women's dynamism in the context of black feminism, see MetinYüksel 2006.
3. Moghadham (1994: 85) borrows the term *patriarchal belt* from demographer J. Caldwell, a term which denotes the geography starting from North Africa and the Middle East extending to the rural India and China, and uses the term to refer to classical patriarchy. The patriarchal family in this geography is the main social unit, and the oldest men have rights over all the other family members. The main characteristic of the social structures under the patriarchal belt is the strict control over women's behavior. In question is a strong ideology which relates the honor of the family to women's chastity.
4. For gender relations among Kurds, see Yalçın-Heckman 2002, Hasanpour, 2001, Barth, 2001, and Bruinessen, 1992a.
5. For the origins of the concept *namus* (*honour*), and the evolution of the surveillance of women's sexuality and behaviors, see G. Tillilon 1983. Nükhet Sirman (2006: 48-49) states that *namus* is used both by men and women in contemporary Turkey, but that there are matters of gender discrimination between women's *namus* and men's *namus*. For a man, *namus* indicates the condition of being trustworthy and establishing control over both his own sexuality and the sexualities of the women under his responsibility; however, for a woman, *namus* is about her own sexuality.
6. Called *Newroz*, *Nevruz*, or *Nuroz*, the festival, which is celebrated on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March across a large geography extending from the Middle East to Asia, celebrates the coming of spring and the coming to life of nature, has gained meanings for Kurds that go well beyond the cultural. The form of *Newroz*, which is associated with the myth of the Kawa the Blacksmith, has become an important element in the construction of Kurdishness as a political identity since the 1960s. According to the myth of the Kawa the Blacksmith, which is defined by Hamit Bozarslan (2002) as the founding myth of Kurdishness, Medes are acknowledged as the ancestors of Kurds, who were enslaved by the Assyrian emperor Dehak. Escaping to the mountains and breaking away from Dehak, Kurdish youth rebelled against the emperor under the leadership of Kawa the Blacksmith. On March 21<sup>st</sup>, they set up bonfires up on the mountains as a symbol of their rebellion against the empire, and of their claims to freedom (Aksoy 1998). Resignification of *Newroz* by the Kurdish political elite since 1960s made possible the constitution of the Kurdish identity in continuity with the ancient peoples of the Mesopotamia—the Medes—and also provided an important space for the expression of the Kurds' present political demands (Demirer, 2005).

7. Ishtar, who is believed to be derived from the Sumerian goddess of fertility Inanna, and who has its roots in the northwestern Semitic goddess Astarte, corresponds in many languages to words denoting stars (star/stern/sterk). In Kurdish star/sterk means both 'star' and a place for shelter.

8. Although most of these sources were published with Öcalan's name as the author, some were published under other pen names. In this article, Öcalan's interviews are also referred to.

9. For an oral history study on the women's perceptions and experiences, see Çağlayan 2007.

10. An edited book involving analyses with similar critiques was published later with the title *Kurdish Love* (Öcalan 1999). In this part of the article, we refer to *Kurdish Love* only for purposes concerning the movement's discourse about the family, since the book involves other subjects and belongs to the 1990s.

11. In the *Woman and Family Question* women are for the most part referred to as 'pulled-down.' 'Being pulled-down' refers to degradation, being dishonorable, being deprived of social, political, economic opportunities and sources, having no choice other than being a wife to a man, being reduced to a sexual object and an instrument of production, and having one's will disregarded. 'Woman pulling a man down' means a woman—who is thus weakened and deprived of will—using her sexuality to bind a man to herself and to family. It is implied that if a man is bound to a woman and to a family, this will prevent him from fulfilling his social and political responsibilities, and he will be deprived of his will, socially and politically, just like the women are. ('Pulled-down' (*düşürülmüş*) is derived from the Turkish verb *düşmek*, to fall. One can compare the term to English fallen when it used passively (pulled-down); yet, in the Turkish original, the verb is also used actively, as in to pull someone down, similar to its figurative use in English, denoting negative moral/emotional influence over some other person.)

12. In Kurdish, *serhildan* means rebellion.

13. On state violence in this period, see Cemal 2003.

14. In 1992, Turkish security forces carried out an armed operation in Northern Iraq, in which PKK forces were located. Iraqi Kurdish armed groups, Talabani's and Barzani's *pesmerges*, were involved in the Turkish army's operation. PKK forces remained between them and a lot of PKK members lost their lives during the conflicts. During this military operation, called the 'South War' in PKK sources, women participated extensively on the frontline. They resisted until the operation ended, and their resistance made them more respected among the movement's armed units. Even those who asserted that women should not participate in the armed conflicts changed their mind. The woman warrior named *Beritan*, who preferred to commit suicide instead of surrendering, was especially influential. Öcalan mentioned her name often in his *analyses*.

15. For the source involving such evaluations, see Öcalan 1992b.

16. For women's activities in political parties, see Çağlayan 2011.

17. Until he was arrested and brought back to Turkey in 1999 the addressor remained Öcalan.

18. An interesting comparison can be made here. As will be remembered, Najmabadi's evaluations were presented in the first part, arguing that in the case of Iran, love for the homeland was constituted as an erotic heterosexual love for men. When women started participating in the movement, the fiction changed, and homeland became a mother, and the women involved in the struggle were imagined as the daughters of the nation taking care of their elder mother (Najmabadi 2000: 148). In the case of the Kurdish movement, although there are examples where the 'homeland' is associated with a mother in pain, in the Kurdish movement's ideological texts one doesn't encounter the identification of the homeland with the mother/woman. In fact, as was partly mentioned above and as will be explained below, what lies at the heart of this discourse is 'freedom,' and liberating/freeing the homeland is a duty that is assigned both to men and women. Therefore, in the ideological register, it is hard to say that the homeland is a gendered concept. Consequently, the 'duty to fight for the homeland' has not produced differences between men and women.

19. See footnote 14.
20. These are Öcalan's words. Esen is one of his pseudonyms.
21. For the term of women's liberation ideology and its principals, see, *Yaşamda Özgür Kadın Dergisi*, 1998, issue 6. For an analysis of Kurdish women's magazines, including this one, see N. Açıık, 2002.
22. The author for this source is said to be Melsa Serok, which is another *nom de guerre*. The source consists of anonymous texts which came out as results of discussions among women and of the conferences, plus Öcalan's evaluations.
23. One of the texts in which the aforementioned changes are most obvious is the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress Report in 1995. This report, which was read by the author before, was out of reach due to prohibitions. In fact, a similar problem is pertinent for most of the referred sources.
24. For the contents of the summarized ideological transformation, see Öcalan 2004.
25. For the long and detailed texts that are subject to evaluation, see Öcalan 2001, Öcalan 1999, Öcalan 2004.
26. As indicated above, Esen is a pen-name. Although the book involves Öcalan's analyses, the quoted text is an anonymous text by the women of the PKK.

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## ABSTRACTS

The Kurdish movement in post-1980 Turkey successfully mobilized Kurdish women. Themes related to gender equality have gained importance especially in late 1990s, when Kurdish women started to participate actively in the Kurdish movement. In the same period, the mythological sources of Kurdishness as a political identity were changed. Building on feminist studies exposing the interaction between ethnic/nationalist processes and gender relations, this article aims to examine the Kurdish movement's ideological discourse from a gender perspective. By analyzing Öcalan's writings during the 1978-1999 period, the article argues that there is a mutual interaction between the Kurdish movement's ideological political and women's agency in political participation. The paper shows that the left-wing and secular characteristics of the Kurdish movement facilitated women's participation in the movement and that women's participation affected both the importance of gender equality within the ideological and political discourse of the Kurdish movement and within its organizational structure. The paper concludes by pointing out the limits and contradictions of the movement's discourse on gender equality.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** identity, ideology, Kurdish movement, Kurdish women, PKK and nationalism