

Counter Publicity of Kurdish Women Journals: ROZA as an Alternative Media Exam

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Abstract

Women activists of the Kurdish movement in Turkey at beginning of the 1990s simultaneously criticized the Kurdish policy of formal ideology and patriarchal structure. ROZA, which was published as a result of this critical approach, was a periodical media through which Kurdish women made their voices heard within multi-layered woman publicity conditions. In this study, ROZA the first Kurdish feminist-journal is examined as an alternative feminist media example that began publication in March 1996 and continued until 1998. The struggle of Kurdish women was shown through this alternative media, which critiqued the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, migration and honour killings in Turkey.

Keywords: Counter Public Sphere, Alternative Media, Gender, Kurdish Women's Movement in Turkey, Violence

Introduction

Kurdish feminists when compared to Turkish feminists, emerged relatively late due to numerous reasons, but primarily because, being immigrant urban women, they struggled to stay within the Kurdish movement. However, a group of Kurdish women influenced by the feminist movement began to emerge during 1980s and has gained strength during the 1990s, founding "-The Group of Independent Kurdish Women-" This group an important network provided Kurdish women, with a way to recognize themselves and designate their demands and agenda.

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Kurdish women have experiences different from Kurdish men because they are women; but they also differ from Turkish feminist women, since their womanhood and national identities are intertwined. ROZA, the first feminist Kurdish journal published in Turkey, began in March 1996 as a response to the need for Kurdish women to raise their voices, express themselves and have an independent organization. The importance of this study, which examines the potentiality of ROZA, as an example of alternative media, that creates a counter public sphere, will be grasped in a better understood if we first consider the political conditions during the publication years of the journal. The predominance of the Kurdish question in Turkish politics dates back to 1984 with an attack that the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) launched on military installations in south-eastern Turkey. By the year 1990, the intensity of conflict between the armed forces and the PKK had increased and there was a simultaneous rise in the number of civilian protestors on the streets protesting the government's policies. The armed forces evacuated certain villages (whose inhabitants were suspected of being associated with PKK) by purposely setting the villages on fire. According to some estimates, around 3000 villages were evacuated and around 3 million people migrated to the west of country. It is in this context that separate women's movement out of the Kurdish movement contending with the oppression that Kurdish women face has emerged. The central factor that united Kurdish women was the identity they shared, their 'Kurdishness'. Yet, although this politicization started with an emphasis on Kurdish ethnic identity, eventually women raised concerns that specifically deal with gender and women's issues.

The influences of the Kurdish conflict on women were two fold. On the one hand, the environment of violence and insecurity increased the vulnerability of Kurdish women in the region; and on the other hand, it led to the politicization of Kurdish women, as these women became actively involved in political parties and organization and participated in party meetings, demonstrations and protests, even sometimes ending up in prison (Dinçer and Toktaş, 2010, p. 47-48). The violence and poverty that resulted from the evacuation of villages and enforced immigrations disrupted Kurdish women's lives. During this period, based on the denial of the Kurdish people's demand for their own country, unsolved murders swiftly increased and more importantly, Kurdish women assumed the responsibilities of imprisoned Kurdish men. This process left Kurdish women, who were uneducated and completely unfamiliar with the Turkish language, in a difficult situation in all aspects, but it also politicized them and thereby directed them toward the political struggle.

Women's participation in the political struggle as active subjects also led to the transformation of the Kurdish nationalist movement (Akkoç et. al. 2004, p. 93-105; Çağlayan, 2007). Therefore "The Group of Independent Kurdish Women" was founded as a result of the necessity of having an organization separate from Kurdish men and Turkish feminists: the stated mission of the organization is that it "had the duty of being a school for the process of self awareness" with their own words. In fact, some Kurdish women's journal such as *JuJin*, *Jiyan*, *Yaşamda Özgür Kadın*, and *ROZA* in particular, are the most notable manifestations of the works of this group (Açık, 2009; Canan, 2005, p. 224). *ROZA* began not only as a result of the second wave of feminist movement, which expanded during the 1980s in Turkey, but also as a reaction to the exclusivist attitude of this feminist movement against Kurdish women. According to Fatma Kayhan one of the founders of the journal, this faction remained silent to the actions of the state that targeted Kurdish women in the state of emergency (Olağanüstü Hal Bölge Valiliği OHAL) and did not honour the requests of Kurdish women concerning self-expression in the their native language.

It is in this political context that the *ROZA* was published by the Kurdish feminists in 1990's. So *ROZA* was an alternative media, not only in format, but also in content, and formed a counter public sphere for the following reason:

It published discussions regarding the Kurdish question raised during that period
 It referred to the state as a source of violence and demonstrated this viewpoint with the articles published
 It levelled criticisms against sexist policies of the Kurdish movement of which was a component.
 It played a leadership role in fighting for sexual emancipation that it signified as the starting point of the Kurdish women's movement.

ROZA took a stand against the Order of State of Republic of Turkey by discussing the Kurdish question and against the Turkish society criticizing patriarchal discourse on gender. Thus *ROZA* clashed with two major power centres in Turkish society in its endeavour to establish Kurdish women's identity. These aspect of *ROZA* will be analyzed under three thematic topics:

- The Kurdish question and conflicts in the region;
- Sexist ideology and as its extension, the concept of honour and

-State violence.

This study first examines the technical details of the journal: format, periodicity, distribution sales and price. Second, it examines the content of the journal through specified topics and their potentiality to establish a counter public sphere.

Formal Characteristics and the Structure of ROZA

The journal was published in Istanbul by a group of women who defined themselves as "Kurdish feminists". Fatma Kayhan is mentioned as the owner and head of the editorial office of the journal in the copyright page. Although signatures of men are found in a few texts, it might be said that staff was predominantly female. While writers used only their names in some articles in the journal, sometimes both first names and surnames were included. Besides the permanent group of writers at ROZA, there are names of different guest writers in every in every issue. As previously stated, the first issue of ROZA was published in March-April 1996 and continued as a bimonthly journal. Later on it has continued to be published every two months. A total of eight issues were examined within the scope of this study. These are issues 2-3-4-5-9-10-11 and 15. The other issues of the journal could not be obtained. The information about the journal's recall and trial process was acquired through the "SEVGİLİ KADINLAR" column, which was consistently the lead article. The second, third and fifth issues were under dispute for promoting separatism and were judged by State Security Courts (SSC) of the period accordingly. What is more, the second, third and fourteenth issues were recalled due to the SSC's decision and four writers were charged with separatism. ROZA listed information about the journal's publication process and conditions on the first page in every issue under the heading "SEVGİLİ KADINLAR" (DEAR WOMEN) and with the signature of ROZA. Since the first issue of the journal could not be obtained, our analysis began with the second issue. In the "SEVGİLİ KADINLAR" column of the second issue, the story about how the journal was published might be summarized as follows: "Grappling with manifold inadequacies, we were able to publish this second issue only with the assistance and support of our numerous foul-weather friends." The column also noted that the financial organization of the journal was accomplished through cooperation among women and that there was no professional organizing. Turkish-Kurdish and Armenian women were thanked for their contributions to sales, promotions and subscription procedures.

The formal features of alternative publications reflect the preferences of being an alternative media: "Produced through typewriting and handwriting ready to be printed with cheap or recyclable papers, creative, new magazine formats that are attentive to lower classes are tried. The journal format is also expanded for newspapers and brochures." (Köker, 1996, p.30-31). Similarly, ROZA has these same general characteristics. The published journal with an average length of 40-50 pages was printed on detail paper. Alternative feminist media, question ownership relations, manager-managed relations, oppressor-oppressed relations and minority-majority relations. (Bailey et. al. 2007, p. 18; Albert, 1997; Timisi, 1996, p. 55). ROZA was extremely meticulous and selective choosing advertisements for its pages. ROZA generally obtained its income from advertisement and subscription fees. Subscription and advertising networks also experience the same difficulties and problems with alternative media. ROZA had no specific sale team, but writers sold and distributed the journal through their own networks. Readers were also asked to assist in the journal sales. In fact, readers undertook sales and subscription duties voluntarily. As Canan, one of the founders of the journal remarks, the journal staff had several fears and concerns in the first phase of publishing. Canan emphasizes that the women did not have sufficient experiences as writers, except Fatma Kayhan.

The women worked in the mornings to publish ROZA and then went to their workplaces in the afternoon and every woman contributed 5 million Turkish Lira for the publishing venture. Canan also expounds that the journal had no stable office space and that some Kurdish associations and institutions supported the women's efforts by donating space (Canan, 2005, p. 224-226). In this structure, wherein no manager/employee relations existed, everyone, when needed, undertook whatever job needed to be completed. In contrast to mainstream media, the members of the ROZA community were both producers and purchasers and neither conventional professionalism nor special expertise was required to write. A collective structure existed in the management and in the process of creating the journal's message. The collective and participatory structure of the journal monocentric authority and instead shared it among individuals. (Bailey et. al., 2007, p. 18; Timisi, 1996, p. 56). For ROZA, writers became readers and readers became writers: grammatical rules and layout principles were not stringently followed. Manifold ambiguities and spelling errors were present in articles which did not fall into consistent classifications. The writers' frequently changed, and articles from readers were published without editing. Thus there was no real distinction between writer and reader.

Readers were often addressed and appealed to in Kurdish articles. The journal's interactive character was highlighted in Issue 15: "Our publishing policy, from the beginning, is to encourage women to write, to reveal their existing potentials and to provide a domain to express themselves. In particular, we give priority to people who write for the first time only if it does not conflict with our policy." As one might understand from these sentences, everyone who desires to write can be writer for ROZA. This policy may be seen as an indicator of the attempt to overcome the reader-writer duality. Stressing collective management and production is the result of the reaction against authority. Operations in the mainstream media stem from centralization in authoritarian and bureaucratic management and special expertise is a fundamental quality demanded in writers and editors. However the collective and participatory structure of alternative media, in management and the creation of the message, eliminates the monocentricity of authority and distributes power among individuals. Being an expert is not a requirement in this process.

Therefore, in some cases, education and professionalism are not demanded for working on an alternative publication. Collectivity is a working model for groups, such as women, who are oppressed in society and pull together to share experiences (Bailey et. al, 2007, p. 18; Planton and Deuze, 2003, p. 345). Also the feminist media inverts the hierarchical work order and the rivalry that is common in the typical publishing environment. Thus it is different from the mainstream media in its organizational structure and context (Timisi, 1996, p.57; Köker and Doğanay, 2007) the established roles of the reporter, news editor and editorial director altered by the networks of relations included in the pyramid of publication are denied (Köker 1996, 31). The collective configuration of management and production was frequently underscored in with articles signed ROZA. Detailed information was provided about the collective structure of production in the column titled "SEVGİLİ KADINLAR" in each issue. The people who wrote articles and also helped with the layout and redaction are thanked separately. In addition, in an article titled "Writing to ROZA" in the fifth issue, "women of all classes, ages and nationalities" were encouraged to send their articles to "write about different concerns, to break the shell, to express herself/himself in distinct circles, to break passiveness and "to be I." Thus, the journal attempted to provide shared experience and information as well as interactions among women. Information about conferences and meetings that ROZA attended both locally and abroad was provided in the journal. The people that represented ROZA were labelled as "ROZA" or "ROZA circle."

Thus, based on above discussion, we can conclude that there were no defined roles or designations for people who worked on the journal. The next section discusses the counter public sphere and ROZA's ability to create one, which is within the scope of the three thematic topics enumerated above.

Potentiality of ROZA to Form a Counter Public Sphere

Fraser (1992), questions the limits of the concept of public sphere in which democratic societies, as well as the fundamental assumptions about the bourgeois public sphere in Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* conceptualizes the public sphere not only as a sphere to create public opinion, but also as a sphere in which social identities are acquired. Therefore, Fraser argues that political participation in modern societies, as idealized by Habermas, is performed through speech situations. She maintains that citizens negotiate on common issues: she gives Habermas his due by stating that the concept of "public sphere", which corresponds to an institutionalized discursive interaction, is a necessary starting point for all critical attempts to grasp the limits of democracy in late capitalist societies. However, she also draws attention to how the bourgeois public sphere, idealized by Habermas, reproduces social inequality. In fact, the bourgeois public sphere conceptualized by Habermas is a sphere in which it is possible for participants to negotiate by bracketing social statuses as if they are equal. By the same token, according to Habermas, an increase in conflicting and differ publics considered as a step backward from democracy. According Habermas understanding of the public sphere, a singular and overarching public sphere is preferred to multiple publics and the discourse in the public sphere is bordered by a "common good". Hence, the understanding in question involves in itself an assumption that discussing and negotiating private benefits and issues in the public sphere are unfavourable (Fraser, 1992).

Fraser criticizes Habermas' bourgeois public sphere conceptualization by means of these basic points. First, Fraser remarks that the process of bracketing status differences invariably favours the dominant group to the detriment of the dependent group. In fact, although status inequality exists in reality, acting as if it does not is the biggest obstacle in developing participation equality.

At this point, Fraser states that members of dependent social groups such as workers, women, minorities, gays, lesbians and transsexuals, believe that forming alternative publics always works in their favour. She suggests naming members of dependent social groups as the "opponent" since they have identities, benefits and needs and "subordinate counter publics" by allowing counter discourses. As dependent groups, by means of these counter publics, they will be able to state their needs and identities vividly through the new discourse they formed and will reduce their disadvantageous positions in the formal public sphere. With the expansion of the field of discourse due to counter publics formed by dependent groups who are excluded from the sovereign public sphere, the discussion of issues previously ignored might be conducted publicly (1992). Fraser's conceptualization of subordinate counter publics, which is developed on the basis of the critique of fundamental assumptions about the bourgeois public sphere (idealized by Habermas) draws attention to the possibility of social groups, who cannot find or are fettered in finding an opportunity to discuss their identities, demands and needs in the formal public sphere, where they can express themselves and their demands in their own voice. Thus the application of a real democracy is possible only with the existence of multiple publics. Hence, "the struggle that distinct identities"- who are excluded because of ethnic, religious and sexual identities and who are deprived of the possibility to express their demands in the sovereign public sphere perform with their own voices and alternative political behaviours and discourse forms should be emphasized and supported.

Kurdish women have been deprived of the possibility of articulating their demands due to their ethnic and sexual identities in the sovereign public sphere for years. ROZA was a medium through which women not only highlighted the unjust social and political treatment they were exposed to, but also demanded a resolution to this unjust treatment. Political statements and actions in ROZA, were thus considered to be a contribution to the existence of the multiple publics that democracy needs. A concept that renders possible discussion on a "contribution" in a counter public sphere. ROZA initiated open discussions on racism and sexism in all its dimensions with both universal and particular examples. Articles in ROZA, about two challenging problems, the Kurdish question and honour killings created a public sphere in which women, whose victimization becomes invisible due to ethnic and sexual identity, were able to express their thoughts and feelings in their own words. Brave and critical language either not present in the mainstream media or developed against specific issues articulated in the formal ideology of the state, was remarkable.

There were three fields of struggle for ROZA the consideration of honour killings as in the Kurdish question: the Order of State of Republic of Turkey that ROZA defined as colonist: its police\security forces and its informal racist/sexist ideology and traditional Kurdish society with its patriarchal and feudal values as well as Kurdish men who define themselves as socialist and intellectual and who are involved in the Kurdish movement.

ROZA's Depiction of Kurdish/Feminist Womanhood

According to John D. H. Downing (2009; 2008; 2001) alternative media generally express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities and perspective. So its form and subject since finding anti-hegemonic discussions in the mainstream media would not have been possible. As the discussions shared above have indicated, ROZA is an alternative media because of its form and subject since finding such discussions in the Turkish mainstream media would not have been possible. Article series published with titles such as “SEVGİLİ KADINLAR” (Dear Women) and “MERHABA” (Hello) and with the signature of ROZA, presented a framework, in addition to published articles, in which the journal's attitude towards current issues and problems were manifested. The main themes were Kurdish and woman identities, identity problem of Kurdish women, feminist theory and practice, women's sexuality, violence against woman/honour killings, state violence, war or civil war, peace, torture, human rights violations, international issues, immigration, education in the native language, racism, the Kurdish and Turkish left in the context of sexism, news about the Kurdish women's movement and the agenda in Turkey.

The journal underscored two identities while describing itself: Woman and Kurdish. ROZA openly defined itself as a journal opposed to racism and sexism. The point that these two cannot be separated is the main emphasis of the journal. In this context, the journal, developed a dissenter policy against the Order of State of Republic of Turkey by defining Kurds as a “colony” nation; on the other hand, the journal remained in a dissenter position against Kurdish men within the patriarchal structure of the Kurdish society. While imitating black and radical feminists struggle against racism for their struggle against sexism, they targeted “civil war”, militarism, state violence, immigration and Turkish feminism.

The main themes of the journal were that they were “oppressed by the state”, as the women of a society that is a “colony”, and what is worse; they were oppressed because of their own society's patriarchy and thereby exposed to exploitation twice (1997 Issue:10, p:5). In this regard, it could be said that there were two others’ in the ROZA circle; one is outside and the other is inside. The former one was undoubtedly “the colonist Turkish state” that Kurdish women struggled against together with Kurdish men. The inside “enemy” was Kurdish men who fight against the Turkish state, namely, the internal other. ROZA circle did not desire solely “the emancipation of the Kurdish nation, but also demanded a world in which Kurdish women, who shoulder the national emancipation struggle as much as Kurdish men do and even more than they do can improve their identities freely. Moreover, they struggled against Kurdish men separately while struggling with them together against the colonial state together to establish new state. However, the ROZA circle contended that they were a part of the Kurdish emancipation movement but were not hesitant to come forward to criticize traditional patriarchal relations and the Kurdish intellectual profile severely owing to its sexist point, which claimed to displace all types of inequalities. The Kurdish women's circle that is nourished by radical feministⁱ thoughts in that sense is close to black feminism because of its opposition to racism. The arguments below have evidential value for the aforementioned claims.

The article titled “Will Love Be Executed Even in Our Free Homeland’, published in eleventh issue, discussed the relationship of the ROZA circle with the identities, that spring to life under the name of Kurdish/Woman/Feminist. In this article, sexist and racist ideology was discussed crystallized in the story of Sevda, who was killed by her brother because according to him, she went to the cinema and displayed loose gestures. The article, written by Hatice Yaşar, stated “The murder of Sevda and the violence that targets Kurdish people are similar to two siblings” since in the former there is the man who is supported through sovereign values and in the latter there is the state that assigns itself as an elder brother for Kurds. The honour that kills Sevda who strives for having a voice for her sexuality, and the logic of the State which kills Kurds who endeavours to protect their language and cultural rights, are the same thing. Hence, ROZA defined itself as being Kurdish first, and then female (1997, Issue:11, p.9). The ROZA circle also criticized intellectual-socialist or revolutionary Kurdish men who differentiated the aforesaid murders from political murders.

The question of how one can ignore the injustice that an oppressed sex is exposed to while advocating for the rights of an oppressed nation is asked in this way: "It does not matter whether it is the sovereign nation or sex, both of them do not see themselves equal to those whose identities are seized... Two chief taboos are, for our situation, "National Pact boundaries" and "standards of judgment" of the Kurdish society... We started to judge, as women from an oppressed nation, the taboo of National Pact... Now we should initiate the same process with our second identity, that is, womanhood. We should display determination against executions done by Kurdish men as much as to executions done by colonists..." (1997, Issue 11, p:10) These statements indicate that, even on behalf of national emancipation, Kurdish feminism does not surrender some of its rights and they fight for these rights against Kurdish men. It was frequently expressed in various issues of the journal that nationalist Kurdish men blame feminist Kurdish women for "being degenerate." Hence, Kurdish men believed, as in similar national emancipation struggles, that feminism was unnecessary, and even assumed that it was an approach that damaged the Kurdish movement. The criticisms that are shaped around the thesis that the urban-feminist Kurdish woman is different from real, self-sacrificing women representing traditional Kurdishness were continually answered by the ROZA circle. The ROZA circle, described itself as urban Kurdish women and also objected to the distinction between rural and urban made through the theme of oppression.

The circle also stated that urban Kurdish women were also oppressed in different ways and that Kurdish men, holders of the traditional structure, did not want to understand this and do bastardize it by assessing the issue in the context of "real Kurdish woman." "Intellectual" Kurdish men are heavily criticized in this sense. For instance, a Kurdish woman's representation as a "rural woman in traditional dress" is not accepted by the developing urban Kurdish woman (1999, Issue:15, p:3-6) According to the ROZA circle, Kurdish women have a sexual identity and claim to sexual rights as much as Kurdish men. In this context, if national emancipation is the goal, feudal structure must be destroyed. Furthermore, it is advocated that women deserve freedom, as much as men and that exercise of these rights will result democracy and emancipation (1997, Issue:11, p:10). As it is seen in the quotation above, ROZA had an ideology grid that was defined by urban-feminist Kurdish women's identity. There were two basic feminist approaches by which the journal was nourished. The first one, undoubtedly, was Black feminism, which made it possible to assume that victimizations derived from being Kurdish.

The second one was that the radical feminist approach provided an opportunity to discuss the problems that stem from being a woman and honour killings in particular, on the basis of sexuality.

Critical Approach to Honour Killings

According to the ROZA circle, the hegemonic sexuality discourse in Turkey, articulated as formal ideology, grasps honour killingsⁱⁱ as the problem of uneducated, backward, primitive Kurds. For ROZA, women's circles that introduce themselves as "leftist and feminist" also adopt this discourse, articulated as sexist and racist ideologies. Honour, however, has the same meaning and significance for Turkey: it is "a set of values in which extra-marital affairs are not approved, maidenhead is a taboo and the sanction is evidently death." Owing to this widely acknowledged standpoint, murders are committed in the name of honour. Yet, despite all their similarities, murders that Kurdish and Turkish men commit are differentiated (1996, Issue: 3, p:1). The article, published in the eleventh issue in 1997, titled "We Have Seen the Murder Here and There" and written by Hacer Yıldırım, explained the practical reasons for the racist and sexist ideology, which honour killings/crimes of custom discrimination involve, nourished by the state and the media, but particularly through academy, consciously and systematically. Whereas the honour killings committed in the Eastern part of Turkey, namely by the Kurds, are labelled as crimes of custom in the hegemonic discourse against honour killings, the crimes in the West are labelled as honour. What it means is obvious: the Kurds are a primitive society to such an extent that they kill their own women due to backward and primitive customs (1997, Issue:11, p:7). By virtue of these types of interpretations women are killed twice who have fallen victim to honour killings: first of all, these women are killed by the patriarchal structure of which they are members, and second, they are sacrificed to strengthen the racist stance: "TURKS COMMIT CRIMES SPLENDIDLY, WHEREAS KURDS DO IT VIOLENTLY." (1997, Issue:11, p:8).

As emphasized before, the ROZA circle had the consciousness that the violence against women, honour violence in particular, was not a problem for solely traditional or uneducated communities. That consciousness leads to a twofold criticism. The target of the first criticism is hegemonic discourse that is articulated to racist and sexist ideology, and that grasps honour killings as the problem of uneducated, traditional peoples and classes.

The target of second criticism, which emerges as a result of this standpoint, is "Kurdish intellectuals, Kurdish men" and "The national Kurdish movement." For, according to the ROZA circle, honour killings were legitimate in the eyes of not uneducated, traditional Kurdish communities, but also educated Kurdish men defining themselves as intellectuals. Honour, for both groups, is the way and instrument to confiscate woman's will and to monitor her sexuality. In this regard, ROZA's stance, which indicate the points that make ROZA unequivocal concerning the values advocated, propounds that the so called intellectual and leftist Kurdish men are catalyst for the existence of problem of violence against woman. For Kurdish men, however, it is a "non-political, insignificant" question. One of the articles in which that this standpoint was exemplified was published in February 1997 in the fifth issue, which was about the murders of three women: "A socialist says: "It is a matter of honour, there is nothing much to discuss. Also it isn't meaningful to publish a notice by bringing it up." Another socialist says: "We supposed that the event was political and needed to be investigated. But what we saw was honour killings, and then we dropped it out. The things said are true, those women were prostitutes." (1997, Issue: 5, p:26)

This perspective of ROZA's is criticized for provoking women against the patriarchal structure of the Kurdish society, or that it is against the approach of formal ideology towards the issue. ROZA is quite critical against the Kurdish movement of which it is a part: "(...) Well how did Kurdish dissident circle assess the matter? They discounted the matter, did not put it on the agenda. They delayed it by thinking that the problem would be solved when the Kurdish society realizes its emancipation. They sat back and watched how Kurdish women were murdered in order to be "respectful to the standards of judgment of the people." Sometimes they implemented those standards themselves. They regarded women in politics as either sexless sisters or doxies... Nobody thought of censuring murders committed in the name of honour while a murder committed by the state was censured. In fact, this is precisely political." (1996, Issue: 3, p:1)

Conditions of War and Women: Village Guard Rapes, Forced Migration and Violence

Kurdish men and women share distinct destinies in terms of war and its consequences. Poverty, one of the most concrete outcomes of the war, affects women and children. In addition, with the growing militarism during wars male violence at home increase, it directly impinges upon women. Similarly, a new category is created as “women of enemies” which forms another reason for the oppression against Kurdish women. Since women constitute the civil power that is vulnerable and open to attacks, they are directly exposed to state violence. Another responsibility given to women in the conditions of war is to fill the social void in the families of men who go to war and pass away (Çağlayan at al 2011; Çağlayan 2007; Pala 2013:57-77).

It is women who are affected by increasing unemployment in the conditions of war and it is stated that self-sacrifice is inflicted on women while their womanhood demands going down in flames. In this context, while the conditions of war are discussed, it is advocated that the reformation concerning Kurdish women's positions be postponed by Kurdish intellectuals, but that is a deceptive and wrong method and approach. Hence, it is argued that the women who are oppressed directionally both by the conditions of war and by men of her own nation are Kurdish women. The exigency of peace for women who are primarily affected by the all the negativity created by war comes to the forefront. The articles in ROZA said that the women are the species that desires and needs peace the most, and Turkish mothers were also criticized in this context. It is said “Even Turkish mothers sending their sons to military by celebrating it with a flourish of trumpets cannot remain silent at the funerals of their sons.” As it might be understood by the framework above, the ROZA circle acknowledged that the inequalities between men and women are penetrated by categories such race or class and stated that Kurdish women “have their own share” owing to injustices that those categories induce. Forced migration, seen as a result of the war, was another topic under which the injustices were discussed.

In addition to the problem of migration, the problems that derive from being a Kurd in the streets of the city and not being able to use one's mother tongue were presented as a dimension of psychological violence experienced and for this very reason, it was remarked that women were imprisoned, that is, confined indoors. The basic problem women experience during migration is language. Women who do not know any language other than Kurdish, get lonely being forced to live in confinement.

The article titled "Migration is Persecution" in the fourth issue of the journal, explained the isolation to which Kurdish women are subjected. This article explains that Kurdish women coming to cities because of evacuation of villages are labelled as nasty and dirty by virtue of their traditional dresses. An interview conducted with the Kurdish women who are "humiliated" due to traditional dresses illustrates the violence those women feel in this regard: "I have experienced the feeling of being oppressed as I do not speak Turkish. For if I speak Turkish, I can tell them that we are cleaner than them, and these are our traditional dresses." (1996, Issue: 4, p:37). The language problem was also marked as an important factor causing women to work in jobs they were unqualified for. Migration victims living in quite difficult conditions were employed in bad conditions with low wages. Besides work conditions, it was underscored that some difficulties were experienced with regard to the services that each citizen of the Republic of Turkey has the right to receive equally. "When we went to see the doctor to be examined or to be given injection, they examined us or gave injection by holding their mouths and noses as if we are coming from another world. They humiliate us by pointing at our traditional dresses..." (1996, Issue: 4, p:37). Forced migration resulting from evacuation of villages, and poverty as an outcome of it, emerge as another dimension of discrimination to which Kurdish women are exposed. The ROZA circle assessed the circumstances in terms of women demanding immediate peace. The fields where war conditions surround the lives of women were discussed under the themes below:

- Systematic sexual assaults made by police forces of the state that target Kurdish women
- Forced migration stemming from evacuation of villages and poverty that emerged after migration
- The problems and discrimination experienced as a result of forced migration (such as differences in language, clothes and traditions)
- The material and spiritual devastation of Kurdish men due to war and the increasing domestic violence
- Increasing responsibilities of women under conditions in which that Kurdish men engage with in war, are arrested or killed, and then women are transformed into unqualified workers

These reasons form the practical and theoretical ground of women's call for peace. In many articles such as the one titled "Peace Dove is Female" published in the fourth issue in 1996, an intellectual relationship between woman and peace was reported and it was emphasized that women are peace envoys (1996, Issue:4, p:6); women were marked as the most visible victims of the conditions of war.

Conclusion

ROZA was very important in the sense of being the first Kurdish feminist journal fighting for the survival with of the "Kurdish woman" identity in the midst of the 1990s within multilayer woman publicity conditions. ROZA endeavoured to make problems visible by bringing up the issues excluded from the sovereign public sphere and which were excluded from the political agenda and displayed how Kurdish women, both as a Kurd and woman, were exposed to twofold oppression in social and political fields. ROZA indicated how social and political developments existing even today were perceived in the eyes of Kurdish women by discussing patriarchal sexist structure, Kurdish men overlooking the woman identities of Kurdish women, feminists of Turkey and state policies applied at the macro level. In this context, the articles that drew attention to the necessity of social peace and that took the initiative to understand how the violence experienced during Kurd-Turk conflicts, immigration, honour killings, militarism might be re-interpreted from a woman's perspective and discourse, are, therefore, considerably meaningful.

The journal, which strove for reclaiming the Kurdish woman identity excluded from the public sphere, resolving identity problems by making Kurdish woman identity visible and for addressing Kurdish women's needs and demands, had the potential to form a counter public sphere. In fact, beyond portraying victimhood that Kurdish women experienced, the journal also contributed to the provision of social peace through the issues it brought to the table and formed a significant part of pluralistic publicity that democracy needs. ROZA, initiating discussions on the positions of women and men involved in both the Turkish left through its articles, demands, equal rights for Kurdish women in both the national struggle and everyday life. These demands arose from a standpoint that Turkish feminist movement had stayed silent about for years about gender rights. The ROZA circle placed honour killings at the centre of its discussion and argued for sexual freedom, not only within the patriarchal structure of Kurds but also in the eyes of Kurdish men who define themselves as intellectuals.

These women objected to the killing of a woman without referring to innocence condition, contrary to the jurisdiction, media and the rest of the society. In other words, ROZA argued that sexual freedom is a woman's right just as much as a man's. This discourse had the duty to displace the denotation of the Kurdish question, which formal ideology discusses by means of confining it in term of honour killings.

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ⁱ From a radical feminist standpoint, sexuality is comprehended as a social fact and as a dynamic of social inequalities of sexuality in broad terms. This standpoint, which takes sexuality into account as the dynamic that underlies gender, enables gender inequalities to be discussed under the title of sexuality. Thus, pornography in particular, rape and certain types of murder that target women might be considered as a problem of justice, according to this view, sexuality constructed by masculine power is an ideology that puts woman under the surveillance of men and that presents women for the use of man. (MacKinnon 1990; 2003; Sunstein 1990; Young 1997).

ⁱⁱ Honor, which includes the moral norms and prohibitions related to women's sexuality and fertility in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern communities, just like Turkey, describes woman with shame and the man with dignity (sheref) (Abu-Lughod 2004: 97-140; Peristiany 1965: 9-10; Rivers 1965: 22).