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**Security of the Nation:
Why Do We Need ‘Mothers of Martyrs’¹ in Turkey?**
-Esra Gedik

Introduction:

Discussing and defining major political issues in Turkey through the lens of national security has inevitably brought the Kurdish Question, which has always been perceived as a “security” issue created by an “internal enemy” and in the past 30 years has also been perceived as a “terrorism” problem. There has been an armed conflict between the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Turkish armed forces (TAF) for over 30 years. The armed conflict has inflicted heavy material and moral damages on the region, on Kurds in particular, and on the entire society in Turkey in general. It is obvious that the conflict has caused human losses. Those who fulfilled their military service in the region and public officials who served in the security sector have died in the conflict. Therefore, the government, media, Kurdish and Turkish politicians, intellectuals, and non-governmental entities have started to focus more on mothers, both mothers of soldiers and mothers of PKK members, since the arrest of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, in 1999.² In Turkey, women, especially mothers, became a “symbol of the struggle against the PKK.” Before, they were only “ordinary” housewives, but with martyrdom they have become “mothers of the nation,” known to everyone and respected by statesmen and commanders. Motherhood has been used not only as a strategy for deepening nationalist discourse, but also as a strategy for countering the issue of Kurdish nationalism based on national security. With the trial of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, the “relatives of martyrs” (*şehit yakınları*), as they came to be known, began to organize themselves and used anti-PKK sentiments at every opportunity, most notably in the courtroom where some of the families sat while Öcalan was being tried. They internalize the nationalist and militarist structure with conventional subjectification as mothers in Turkey. Mothers’ demonstrations become politically powerful because the women are performing their culturally appropriate role as “good” mothers and bearing witness to their own maternal suffering.

As Burcu Şentürk (2009: 93) says, “In the political context of conflict between the PKK and TAF in Turkey, the soldiers of the TAF are represented as the defenders of the honor of the Turkish nation against the ‘traitors.’” Besides, the mothers of these soldiers are portrayed as the mothers of the Turkish nation who raised loyal citizens for it. Through their motherhoods, these women are expected to support their sons’ mission as the protectors of the “motherland.” Thus, they become mothers as objects of wars who contribute to the continuity of warlike/militarist activities. These mothers are instrumentalized for dealing with the Kurdish problems through national security. The instrumental use of gendered stereotypes in the name of national security becomes most evident in the intimate interrelationship of nationalism and mothers of martyrs.

In this context, I want to evaluate how expressions of grief of mothers who lost their soldier sons in armed conflict in Turkey are used for discourse about the security of the

¹ Mother of Martyr is a concept that is used to identify mothers of soldiers who died in the armed conflict in the East and Southeast of Turkey.

² For the scope of this article, I will only discuss mothers of soldiers in Turkish army forces.

nation in Turkey since relations of mothers and sons in the shadow of war concerns the public domain and mothers' role in the security of the nation. My main argument is that although these women lost their loved ones in an armed conflict because of their "new status" as "mothers of martyrs," they do not question the conflict process but welcome the nationalist discourse of martyrdom based on national security in Turkey. I argue that one of the reasons why mothers of martyrs are needed is that these women I conducted interviews with were considered themselves, and their dead sons, as sanctified, and these women are placated by martyrdom discourse constructed by religion and nationalism in Turkey. Secondly, many other actors having impact on making national security policies in Turkey use mothers of martyrs' grief and their willingness for revenge for the death of their loved ones. In other words, as their sons died for the nation, the big family, they are now accepted as the sons of the nation and these mothers are considered mothers of the nation. Thus, the things done in the armed conflict for the sake of national security and the peace negotiation process, in one way, are justified since it is said that we, as a nation, owe this to these mothers who lost their loved ones for our own security.

Although the subject of research is related "mothers of martyrs," the subject, itself, is related with nationalism, and religion. Below, I will discuss relation between nationalism and religion in the context of martyrdom.

Methodological Approach:

This study uses a feminist methodological approach, a feminist standpoint perspective. The primary methodological tool of the feminist standpoint is the feminist evaluation of women's own experiences. In a society in which women are considered secondary and oppressed, experiences of women are affected by patriarchy. Hence, we cannot examine these experiences that are constructed and affected by patriarchy by using traditional methodological ways. Many feminists argue that the true voice of women, the women's experience, has been embedded in a traditionally "male" work. As the field of social research has, at least until recently, been dominated by males, the equation linking "male research" with objectivity and social distance is an obvious one. In fact, many feminist scholars argue that the very instruments designed as "objective" do nothing more than reinforce a male dominated worldview which fetishizes the rational, measurable, neutral and objective. Feminist scholars feel that the dominant paradigms contain a pervasive male bias characterized by objectivity, scientific "neutrality" and a hierarchical, distanced, essentially authoritative relationship between the "Researcher/Expert" and "His" subjects. Researchers who rely exclusively or even very strongly on objective measures are felt to be identified with this predominantly "male" mode of analysis. Such modes of analysis, it is felt, necessarily inhibit an understanding of women's experiences.

As a response, a feminist orientation to research grounds its focus on women's experiences, using these experiences as an indicator of the "reality" against which hypotheses are tested (Harding, 1986:6-7). With the feminist methodology, it is intended to reach the knowledge which is free from impact of patriarchy. According to Beverly Skeggs (1994: 77), feminist research is distinct from non-feminist research because it "begins from the premise that the nature of reality in western society is unequal and hierarchical." In a similar way, Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002: 2-3) note that "feminist research is imbued with particular theoretical, political and ethical concerns that make these varied approaches to social

research distinctive.”

Feminist perspectives suggest taking a broader view. This research aims “to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women’s unequal social position. This entails the substantive task of making gender a fundamental category for our understanding of the social order, ‘to see the world from women’s place in it’” (Lather 1988: 571). Hence, what distinguishes this study as a feminist study is that feminist methods do not lie in the choice of research questions alone, but are tied to questions about how data will be collected, presented and used. As a feminist study, there is “the acknowledgment of the reciprocal sharing of knowledge and experience between the researcher and the researched” (Shields and Dervin 1993: 67). With this way, this study plans to undo the conventional dichotomies and hierarchies in the research situation. The process entails not only speaking with and listening to women, but also demands that the researcher share the research project with participants, involving them at each phase of the research and including their input in the interpretation of results. As a result, the features of feminist research, including placing value on women’s experiences and subjectivities, the critical analysis of gender, reflexivity, and the emancipatory motivation, come together in interesting ways in the study of women’s experiences.

Aiming to find answers to suggested research questions, I plan to conduct in-depth interviews. I have decided to use in-depth interviewing as the main method to collect data for the study since a qualitative is adopted for the investigation. The central concern of the interpretative research understands women’s experiences. Shulamit Reinharz (1992: 19) explains how interviewing is a way feminist researchers have attempted to access women’s hidden knowledge:

Interviewing offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher. This asset is particularly important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women’s ideas altogether or having men speaks for women. (cited in Hesse-Biber, 2006: 118)

Hence, this study uses in-depth interview methods to learn women’s own experiences from the women’s side, and by this way I plan feminist research not on women, but for women.

At the beginning, I chose mothers from *Şehit Aileleri Federasyonu* (ŞAF)³ who may talk about their experiences and the experiences of others. For that reason, I went to the organization once or twice in three weeks. I tried to be a participant observer for a while. Then, I went to cemetery of martyrs in Cebeci/Ankara in Turkey on Fridays to find mothers of martyrs since those mothers’ “new home in which they spend most of their time, has become cemetery.” In a final step, I relied on a snowball method to talk to mothers in Merzifon/Amasya, Havza/Samsun and Suluova/Amasya in Turkey. I interviewed nineteen people, fourteen mothers of martyrs, three fathers of martyrs and two wives of martyrs. Because of the socio-demographic structure of the region, although I did not plan to compare Sunni mothers and Alevi mothers, the interpretations of the narratives are based on

³ Association of Families of Martyrs.

the differences of Sunni Islam⁴ and Alevi thought.⁵ The narratives of these people proved to be an interesting case to show how personal narratives interact, overlap or contest with the hegemonic nationalist discourses about them and war.

Mothers, Nations and Mothers of Nation:

The literature review about mothers and motherhood reveals many different discussion topics, including working mothers, “bad” mothers, black mothers or lesbian mothers and so on. What is striking about the discussion to date is the absence of an explicit definition of motherhood in most, if not all, of the literature. Aspects of motherhood and qualities of mothers, actual and imagined, are described, but the concept itself is not subjected to a rigorous interrogation. Motherhood, enveloped with beliefs and values, is institutionalized not only in marriage and family arrangements and practices, but also in law and social policy and through representations in literature, film, and other cultural forms (Kaplan, 1992). For Walker (1995: 418), the international debate has exposed shortcomings in commonsense views of motherhood as “naturally” the role of women. More noteworthy, there is a degree of agreement on the content of motherhood: it is to nurture, to preserve, to protect.

All nationalist projects involve a remaking of femininities and masculinities, with an ambivalent set of opportunities and restrictions for both. Questions of woman are central to all debates in a nation-building process. In that context, nationalist movements across the world employ mothers as a symbol of the nation (Mayer, 2000). Hence, the building of a nation involves different interventions and inscription upon female identity, whether through the assignment of forged roles such as mother, all serving one way or another the

⁴ There are four Sunni sects in Islam: Hanafi, Shafi’i, Maliki, and Hanbali. The Hanafi sect is the largest of the four, and its followers comprise 45% of the entire Islamic world. It takes its name from its founder, Ebu Hanife (Numan bin Sabit) (699-767), and is widespread in Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, India, and Pakistan. Sunni Islam itself takes its name from its identification with the importance of the Sunna (the examples from the hadiths). There are many small religious differences, and some large differences, Sunni Islam and the other orientations. For instance, Sunni Islam reveres [Ali](#), but does not hold him up as the only true continuation of the tradition from Muhammad, and has no emphasis on his bringing a divine light from the Prophet (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2006: 31).

⁵ Alevism can be primarily understood as a syncretistic heterodox identity, as along with Islam, Zoroastrianism (Iranian), Shamanism, Maniheim, Christianity, and so on. It has many more elements of pre-Islamic Turkish and Iranian religions than Sunni Islam does. For example, prayer (*namaz*), the fast in Ramadan, tithing (*zakat*), and the hajj are alien practices in most Alevi communities. Instead, they have their own religious ceremonies (*cem*), officiated by holy men (*dede*) belonging to a hereditary priestly caste. As among other schismatic Shi’i groups, ‘Ali and the Safavid Shah Isma’il are deified, or at least idolized. Instead of adherence to the Shari’a, Alevis profess obedience to a set of simple moral norms; they claim to live according to the inner (*batin*) meaning of religion rather than its external (*zahir*) demands.

There is a noticeable conflict among Alevi groups in that it is “represented” differently based on the ideological dominations. The first group focuses on the religious side of Alevism, defining it as an Islamic sect and a part of Islam. This group uses the term “Alevi Islam,” and most of them try to present Alevism as true Islam, or Turkish Islam. The Second group directs Alevis to abandon their religious identity. This group puts emphasize on sources other than Islam, Iranian of Turkish basis (Şahin, http://www.alevihaber.org/v2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=263&Itemid=39).

formation of a sense of nationhood.

There are several reasons why women become such a target toward the building of a new nation. The significance of mothers is "the main vehicle through which people first form their identities and learn their place in society" (Forcey, 1994: 357). Women are mothers, are life givers, and are mothers of next generations, mothers of the nation. Nira Yuval Davis and Flora Anthias (2003) have suggested that women's relation to nation has taken at least five major forms. Women serve as biological reproducers of national groups (the biological mothers of the people); as symbols and signifiers of national difference in male discourse; as transmitters and producers of the cultural narratives themselves (mothers, teachers, writers...); as reproducers of the boundaries of the nation; as active participants in national movements: in armies, congress, community organizations. In that point, Joanne Nagel expresses,

Nation is a kind of family where man, as a head of family, and woman, as a mother, play their natural roles. Women have a crucial place as mothers of nation while they are dominated by nationalist movements and politics. (Cited in Şerifsoy, 2004: 171)

According to Natarajan, women shape national imagination (Cited in Saigol, 2004: 232). For her, "woman, with her status of being mother, evoke unity and integrity of a nation." She adds,

How does figure of mother unify the nation? "Mother" reminds common cultural roots (provides a shelter and food). Like soil, mother is eternal, patient, and indispensable. National demands are supported with solid demands. (Cited in Saigol, 2004: 233)

Since a role of mothers is to raise new generations and implant cultural values, motherhood has been mostly used in order to indicate internal and dominated cultural territory for new born nations. Gaitskell and Unterthal (Cited in Saigol, 2004:233) point out in their study about African nationalism that the idea of motherhood has changed during the 20th century and added that motherhood is not only a fixed biological concept but also a flexible expression. For Yuval-Davis and Anthias, "women do not only teach and transfer the national cultural and ideological traditions, but also mostly, they form them." Mothers play an important role in re-creating the differences between ethnic-national groups. They convey culture and they are privileged signifiers showing national differences. Mothering as ultimately attributed to the whole nation's sake stems from the duties of mothers to the family, society and nation. In that sense, mothers are envisaged as women who carry the genuineness of the nation in a private sphere. Badinter claims,

19th century ideologues that are completely sure about their certainty have benefited from theory of mother's being "naturally altruistic" in expanding mother's responsibilities even more. (...) Women are told that they are the watchdog of ethnic and religion and that the destiny of family and society depend on their way of rearing children. (Cited in Uluğtekin, 2002: 58)

Therefore, in or out of war, mothers play socially attributed roles such as being the mothers raising or giving birth to sons who will be soldiers (martyrs) for the sake of their country and provide health, sexual, nutrition and nursing services to the men in war (Enloe, 1990). Motherhood is attributed to the whole nation's sake from the duties of mothers to the

society and nation. In that sense, the experiences and lives of mothers are shadowed with a manipulated sacrifice since what is important is to rear “good” children for the system. While women are lauded as “mothers of nation,” they are pacified and limited within this role. These kinds of roles, on one hand, points out that mothers are burdened with the roles by patriarchal society. On the other hand, with motherhood, a woman is expected to support the man, who is “protector” for both them and the country where they live in; mothers as objects of wars contribute to continuity of warlike/militarist activities. This stresses that man is depicted as the warrior-hero or citizen-warrior, entrusted with the almost sacred duty to defend the homeland.

For example, Palestinians, like in Turkey, commonly refer to those who have died for national cause as martyrs and to mothers who have lost children as mothers of martyrs. The national movement endowed the “mothers of martyrs” with the status of national icons (Peteet, 1997: 105). As far as concerns Peteet (1997), in Palestine like in Turkey, it is assumed as a national duty to bear many children to replenish wartime losses. In doing so, they locate their reproductive abilities in a national political context. While nationalist discourse celebrates them as icons of the nation, they are celebrating their reproductive potential. Although the mother of the martyr may not have been active politically in the sense of belonging to an organization, nationalist discourse transforms her maternal sacrifice into a supreme political act. Mothers of martyrs are invited to attend resistance celebrations with the leadership, a public, symbolic display of a newly acquired stature in the community (Peteet, 1997: 122).

On the other hand, Marco says that mothers of Plazo de Mayo are not only mothers of their own sons, but also they have become mothers of the whole society and it was indicated that they represent the idea of “social motherhood,” which rebelled against political parties and military government in Argentina. Marco quoted from Schmukler: “After this event in Argentina, we can not articulate motherhood with political passiveness and succumbing anymore” (Cited in Olgun and Yüksel, 1991: 57). In Argentina, mothers have constructed their own agency that is different from dominant structures and discourses in the country in that era. Like in Turkey, in Argentina, the natural role for woman is being wife and mother (Fisher, 1995:5). However, they resisted the dictatorship and transformed women’s view of Argentinian society and their agency in it. The structure in Argentina was military rule while mothers of disappeared occurred. However, it was the condition that constructed those mothers; those women were brought together by the disappearances. It was a force of opposition to the military rule. Women became more conscious of the dimensions of the repression and this made them more determined. Mothers forced to modify their traditional role as mothers and changed their perceptions of their roles within the society. They were challenging the traditional ideology of motherhood, an ideology most commonly found in the moral discourse of the military (Fisher, 1995; Margaret, 2004; Femenia, 1987).

In other words, what I try to show is that motherhood is an ideological status that is defined by different power struggles. Although mostly being a mother is accepted as a significant role of a woman and respected, as is seen in the example, not every mother is accepted in a respectful way—only as long as a woman’s motherhood stays within their (nationalism, religion, the state or the army) definitions of mother. An example from Turkey

for that discussion can be Saturday Mothers. Since May 1995 relatives of those who have "disappeared" in police custody hold a weekly vigil in Istanbul (Cited in <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR44/017/1998>). The Saturday mothers were asking about their beloveds, who went missing under detention, and calling on the government to take legal action against those responsible. However, although they are mothers, their motherhood did not prevent the police from harassing them.

Briefly, an interdisciplinary range of recent feminist studies has diluted and held up for questioning the conflation of motherhood with peace, sacrifice and nurturing (Di Leonardo, 1985; Ruddick, 1989). According to Ruddick (1989), motherhood has a social-political significance, since from its practice peace-aspiring patterns of thinking and awareness have to emerge. This notion has been severely criticized by other feminist scholars, who see womanhood and motherhood as socially constructed, having no predetermined values, attitudes, or habits. Therefore, patriarchal system's positioning of women, especially mothers, within war is based in discourse on essential differences between woman and man due to their nature. Man is the creator of civilization and woman is the element of the continuity of generations. In this discourse, male identity is equal to "culture, political, wisdom, justice, public, power, universality and freedom"; female identity is equal to "nature, personal, emotional, private, morality, obedient" (Pateman, 2004: 124). There are various explanations about why theories of nationalism overlook the gender side. With reference to motherhood, women are described as the passive object of men's sacrifice, thus depriving women of their agency as historical subjects in charge of their own destiny. Mothers in Argentina have been able to challenge the historical narratives of the state and construct competing ones.

In that context, nationalist narratives of mothers of martyrs slide easily from the iconography of nation as woman to the construction of woman as nation, figuring women as motherland, the fecund body of the nation. This narrative is translated into moral imperative, requiring women both to represent the nation through moral virtue and social norms, and to reproduce the national group in biological as well as cultural terms. These images honor the women keeping Turkish national culture alive while their men were resisting foreign invasion during war. Not only have mothers of martyrs been used as a symbol of the nation's security, but in their image, contemporary Turkish women are particularly targeted as strategic to the conservative battle to preserve the nation and its security. Women became a part of this discourse, not only as wives of military men, but also as mothers of the military nation, who themselves gave birth to warriors. As mothers and wives, they were responsible for "reproducing" and "supporting" the nation's military force.

Situation in Turkey, Relation between Nationalism and Religion:

In this study, I apply the territorial nationalism that can explain Turkish nationalism when it is considered in relation between national security and martyr and examine how mothers of soldiers are applied for the justification of the conflict process in East and South East of Turkey. It is worthwhile exploring a little further the linkages between Turkish nationalism and one of its characteristics: territory which can define relationship between martyrdom and nation in the case of Turkish nationalism. There is more to link nationalism to territory than just the changing configurations of the world political map: territory plays a central role both in nationalist identity and in nationalist strategy. The use of territoriality

gives a nation an absolutist and historically continuous presence. In general, a specific geographical area becomes associated with a particular collectivity, in the eyes of its members. This relationship between people and land is the product of continual myth-making. In this way, a particular territory is historicized. They become essential elements of the community's history, and the land becomes a historic homeland, "our land" (Smith, 1986: ch 8). Our land is where we can realize ourselves and our destiny/existence depends on it. That creates a special bond of holiness between the community and its homeland, as well as the piety and awe which surrounds the tombs of warriors, martyrs, laid to rest in the land of their people. Territorial heritages provide the patterns within which elites operate in order to mobilize large numbers. In other words, the ideal of self-renewal and the vision of collective destiny are built upon the territory and justify all the sacrifices that citizens may be asked to make. Nationalism had to inculcate a profound, keen identification with motherland as a sacred and inviolable ancestral homeland, the only guarantor of its history and destiny. In all these cases, large numbers of people have been mobilized and martyred in the defense of lands. Where these lands are by tradition sanctified, the site of sacred acts and memories can be evoked, and even larger numbers of people can be mobilized for battle and death.

In Turkish nationalism, a crucial role is played by territoriality. In that sense, if we admit that the nation-state is an "invention" of the late 18th and the 19th centuries, we can trace how these new states no longer legitimized by divine right sought, and finally instituted, a new basis for their existence. One of the ways to acquire legitimation was to claim that the same people had inhabited the same territory for hundreds of years, being united by bonds of blood, culture, tradition, language, religion, and the like. In the heyday of nationalism historical and philological departments were often established or expanded so as to lend their services to the proving of such assertions. In that sense, the basis of the new republic was to be found in loyalty both to the homeland Anatolia and to the Turkish nation that inhabited it. All citizens of the Turkish state were deemed constitutionally Turks, and this was the broader, political meaning applied to the term "Turk." Remaining legal barriers between the different communities were eliminated and great efforts were made to instill a sense of patriotism in all members of the population. Conceptualization of Turkish history as a history of high civilization among Turks also provides "an organic unity" (Berkay, 1990: 63). This fabricated glorious territory was a panacea for Turkish pride. Decades of indoctrination and a heavy dose of nationalist education created a deep sense of pride in being a Turk. This pride links the individual attachment to national identity. This political affirmation of the pride may stretch from the language of the group becoming an official language to make people believe the importance of sacrificing for the sake of the territory: nation.

Broadly speaking, this involved two processes; the national re-education of the young, and the inculcation of a spirit of self-sacrifice. The knowledge and the love of the homeland became therefore an integral part of a national programme of mass education, and it drew on the prior attachments of the people to their nation. As far as education was concerned, this meant a mass standardization of outlook, values, knowledge and skills in a national framework around the trinity of literature, history and geography. As Smith (1986: 243) points out, these were pre-eminent disciplines for imbuing the young with a national outlook and feeling, for they revealed the inner rhythms of the nation and its profound roots

in the past. As Altınay (2004: 126) examines in her work, the textbooks used throughout the 1970s and the early 1980s make similar claims: “Turks have formed states in all historical epochs. Turkey has won many legendary victories as the greatest military nation of the world.” For early 1990s, the textbooks include passages that define “love for homeland” as the greatest passion of Turks (Milli Güvenlik Bilgisi, 1990: 262) and “heroism” as a spirit that is a hereditary. In Turkey, education and educators have been giving a nationalizing and militarizing role from the early years of nation building. Students throughout Republican History have been told that they are members of a “heroic” race and they should prove this by being good soldiers. Such re-education was not an end in itself. It served to prepare the spirit of the young for a life of service to the nation, and if necessary, of heroic martyrdom.

Under this framework, we should deal with another unique character of Turkish nationalism: its relation with religion. As it is indicated at the beginning, nationalist movements use all or some of the proto-nationalist elements during the nation building process. Nationalism will be successful on the basis of how it actuates those elements such as religion, culture, and language on the way of nation-state building processes. One of these elements is religion. The role of religion in politics has received an enormous amount of scholarly attention, and it is not the purpose of this study to review that literature. However, it is seen that for the true nationalist hero is a martyr, sacrificing his life for his nation. Love of sacred homeland inspires the martyr’s death as it is seen above. For centuries to now, official representatives honor those who died for another sacred cause: the nation. Consequently, the nation state is precious and holy, to worth dying for the sake of as much as God. The social psychology of martyrdom may be viewed as the replacement of a religious ideal by the secular nationalism. But the idea of martyr gives the ideal; the soldier kills or may be killed for the cause. Thus, to be willing to “die for the cause” or to serve for the higher ideal becomes the pledge statement of commitment. For that reason, it will be useful to examine the role and impacts of religion in Turkish nationalism and political culture since religion is an effective element to produce a meaningful world between mothers who have little or no common characteristic besides martyrdom of their sons.

For Schnapper, nation is a political project aiming to establish a new community (umma). This community is a community of citizens. In order to establish this kind of community, secularism is needed symbolizing that “especially social network should be national, I mean, political rather than religious.” However, neither nation was able to destroy traditions nor secularism could provide state’s impartiality about religion, such that “holiness delivers its meaning from religion to nation”, “nation and republic was transformed as a civil religion with its litany, temple and saints”. (Cited in Kalaycı, 1998: 161)

Turkey emerged out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, which ruled over three continents. In this content, the Turkish nation state was built upon a range of potentially opposing elements, tradition and modernization, secularism and religion, nationalism and ethnicity, strategic location and neighborhood disputes, democracy and military political action. Since 1923, during social-political and cultural transformation, religion was the most confused subject we faced. From empire to republic, during the building process of a Turk nation-state, the most comprehensive intervention was made to religion. As far as I

understood from Atay (1998: 100), by this way, ruling elites were not attempting to erase religion from the country. What they wanted to do was not to refuse the religion. On the contrary, for Tapper and Tapper, they wanted to examine (or try to examine) religion in a new way and they wanted to re-define it (Atay, *ibid*, 100). Among newly occurred (or established) nation state's borders, it was aimed to develop a "religion" which was linked to those borders. In a more arrogant way, if we say, it was assumed to create a "Turkish Islam" rather than "Islam." Mardin remarks that "the only way to free oneself from Islamic society is to establish an alternative Islamic society" (Mardin, 2000: 72). Claim of universality of that religion which had existed in that land with its historical, cultural and social dynamics did not fit into the newly established nation state's borders. Consequently, it was forced to be suitable and dependent to this new establishment. The most basic goal of secularism was the separation of the state and religion. However, as Berkes argues, Kemalist secularism did not let religion have its own autonomous existence. Religion was placed under government authority as the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Berkes, 1964: 479).

First attempts to approach the religion in republican political practices with the aim of "*ulusallık*" can be counted as Turkification of Qur'an, Turkish call to God (ezan), Turkification of worship practices. For Zürcher, secularism was not only the separation of state and religion, but also was throwing religion out of the public sphere and establishing full control of the state over the rest of religious institutions. Ultra-nationalist thinking and creating historical myths (Turkish History Thesis or Sun Language Theory) were used to constitute a new national identity. In this way, nationalism replaced religion in most aspects of society (Zürcher, 2004: 264). As mostly common speech, "*Türk'ün yeni amentüsü*" (Turk's new credo) was nationalism (Yıldız, 2001: 213). In that point, nationalism has grown upon references of daily and social lives of people. Nationalism has been positioned as a kind of religion with its holiness, temples, idols, symbols, etc. Religion is seen as a system that should dissolve and a system that is supposed to dissolve. Nevertheless, there is an important paradox of modern national identity. On one hand, religion represents "old regime" that should be destroyed and, on the other hand, it represents a system that modern nation keeps limited in the private sphere in order to justify its power. By this way, although practices lived in the context of nationalism do not refer directly to religion, it provides continuity of infected religiousness. Generally these people are considered to be unable to explain rationally what was happening around them and tend to resort to identifying visible factors to which they attribute blame and support ideologies that can help explain their position. For example, martyrdom discourse based on religion is used to explain the death of soldiers in the armed conflict in Turkey between military in Turkey and PKK. Although versions of 'thou shalt not kill' reverberate through all religious codes, religious beliefs have shaped the way we justify and attribute meaning to killing.

In Turkey, religious reference cherishes national reference or national reference cherishes religious reference. Being a Muslim and being a Turk has been lived together. Though many citizens continue to think of themselves as Muslims first, and Turks afterwards, for most people, Turk is equated with Muslim. Consequently, in that case, religion is linked with the extension of legitimacy to the polity in several ways. In that case, if I summarize, religion is linked with the extension of legitimacy to the polity in several ways. As Ilter Turan (1991: 42-50) claims, first, religion provides a framework within which political power may be exercised. In other words, it is a constraint on what governments can

do and still maintain their legitimacy.

Second, religion is an element of social control that includes values such as being respectful to governmental authority and public servants, and compliance with government's command. In this way, religion is one of several ways through which obedience to political authority is secured. As Binnaz Toprak expresses, since religion has a control system over individuals, how is it possible not to take into consideration of religion while making politics? (Toprak, 1986: 359-367). In other words, if it is asked of people to make political choices, and those people's world of consciousness and emotions can be determined by religion, how can applying religious references while making politics be avoided? The nation state, which did not want to share its power with anybody, could degrade religion, which again could keep its consistency with only the idea of not sharing power with anybody, as a functional element for the sake of its power. These, somehow, have given holiness to "national culture" and become functional to glue elements of "national identity" which were being re-created during the nation state building process.

Finally, religion is a source of symbols, ideas and meanings that are used to elicit positive political behaviors from society. A few examples may help to explain what is meant here. A person who dies in battle for the cause of religion is a *şehit*-martyr- and goes directly to heaven. Now this symbol has been borrowed from religious vocabulary, and is used to describe any public servant who dies in the course of public duty; in this way, government service is elevated to the level of God's cause. Religion in symbols sometimes is nationalized with flags at mosques. In Greece and South Cyprus, a flag is used at church. In 1997, one of the slogans of Nationalist Movement Party was "Nation of Turk is Muslim. They will live Islam and live in Islam." Turgut Özal said: "State is laic but I'm Muslim." Friday sermons are used to invite citizens to engage in acts supportive of government. The Directorate of religious Affairs sends out model sermons to imams (preachers) that may encourage the citizens, for example, to pay their taxes, or to contribute to foundations established to assist armed forces; thus, secular acts are identified as being religiously desirable, and they gain an aura of religious legitimacy. To put it briefly, it seems that the Turkish state, while not viewing religion as giving direction to its policies and actions, continues to treat it as a resource which may be mobilized for "purpose of state" whenever it is found useful or necessary.

In conclusion, as Sakallıoğlu (1996: 250) points out, early republican strategy toward Islam showed two trends, one repressive, the other, a combination of the ideals of secular nationalism with Islamic symbols. In other words, what I tried to prove is that from the beginning of the Turkish nation-state, religion is constructed in the system to justify positive political behaviors. Although there is not an official religion of Turkey at the state level, this nation has a religion that people die for. For that reason, mothers of martyrs said that their sons are martyred for this nation, territory (*vatan için ölmek, şehit olmak*). It can be easily understood then why the secular concept nationalism is linked with martyrdom and death is justified with a religious concept, martyr when the role of religion in Turkish nationalism is considered. After the relation between nationalism and religion, we should look at the issue of martyrdom in which this relation reaches its peak point.

Notion of Martyrdom:

Individuals have died and been killed; in fact, millions of individuals during the 20th century died from war, torture, accidents or etc. Some deaths are memorialized and some are identified as martyrs. This is a function of attribution that distinguishes certain individuals and ways of dying from others, which have been no less significant, but probably less forged in memory. The human mind struggles to put meaning on six million individuals, but can form from a symbolic individual. To die for a cause in itself cannot be a measure of anything; rather it is an accident or incident en route to a goal.

While there are many martyrs to be found in history, few are chosen to be representative of a given movement, belief system or people. Of those few, even fewer speak across cultural boundaries and become national in their reach. It is more common for the bloody details to be spelt out in detail, and for the audience to be brought up to the moment of collective guilt and sorrow through the ritual of narration of the endless suffering of the martyr.

The term martyr is officially recognized by national representatives. As Fouché claimed, the status of martyr appeared as one of the means to get recognition (Cited in, Rosoux, 2004: 110). Indeed, this concept appears to be much more dramatic than the usual notion of “victim.” Here again it is noticeable that the quality of dead as “victim” or as “martyr” is not just a question of vocabulary. The conversion of a victim into a martyr is generally business of official representation. As Agamben said, the important thing is that “This holy life, from the beginning, has a political character and is related with the land where power in rule is established” (Agamben, 2001: 135).

History affords many examples of the use of martyrdom as propaganda and inspirational tool. Therefore, the martyr himself becomes a living definition of the intrinsic nature of the nation for which he was willing to die. Some or all of the following uses can be made of the martyr's death: the strength of his belief as attested to by his willingness to die for his cause can inspire and consolidate the commitment of his followers or young generation to their common cause; the strength of his belief as thereby attested can motivate to action those who sympathized with the cause but are not yet participants; relating and reciting the details of his sufferings can allow his coreligionists to experience his trauma vicariously and thereby evoke a level of sympathy which can further animate the young generation; the extent of the oppression of the system as evidenced by the system's willingness to kill the martyr can radicalize the polarity between the righteousness of the state's cause and the injustice of that against which they struggle; annual commemoration of the martyr's death can serve to keep his sacrifice alive and present in the collective memory and thus help to keep alive the aims and goals of the state; his death can be used as a newsworthy event which can be reported to the outside world in an attempt to elicit sympathy and external support.

The martyr's defining role is most helpful when that particular belief system/nation is under attack within a given geographical location. He creates an example, a standard of conduct by which to judge other fellow believers. By demonstrating publicly that there is something in the subordinated or persecuted nation worth dying for, the value other believers place upon it is augmented, and that nation is highlighted.

Observing the links between martyrdom and politics brings us closer to some of the most teleological and ambivalent uses of death. As far as political approach is concerned, the focus is on the representation of those who commemorate martyrdom. As dead martyrs no longer speak, this representation reveals the process of the decision. Indeed "martyrs are made not simply by their beliefs and actions but by those who witnessed them, remembered them and told their story" (Kassimir, 1991: 62, cited in Rosoux, 2004: 83). So what are the purposes of political uses of martyrdom? In order to have a common will in the present, common glories in the past are needed. This means that shared suffering is more important than shared joy. When national memories are concerned, grievances are of more value than triumphs, for which they impose duties, and require a common effort. In insisting on notions like "sacrifice", "grief", or "shared suffering", it shows that they have special urgency in the framework of nation building. The devotion to their heroic memory is a significant means whereby communities, political or religious, maintain their internal cohesion and control their social formation (Wood, 1993: 91-92). In this framework, the figure of martyr is revealed as particularly useful to maintain national identity, especially in a crisis situation. In the context of war, the emphasis of martyrdom is a powerful weapon since it can lead to the identification of the persecutors with the devil. When tragic events are constantly recalled during an international or intercommunity conflict, they can be used as incentives in order to redress suffering. In that case, the purpose is not only to reinforce the national cohesion. It is above all to justify a feeling of hatred for the enemy. According to Rosoux, this emotional rhetoric of the martyr pursues three main aims (Rosoux, *ibid*, p. 100).

First of all, it is pedagogical. The supreme sacrifice of the martyr constitutes an example and a guide for the population. It remains one of the key founding references of national identity. Martyr is not only used to edify young generations. The second purpose of this commemoration is directly linked to political circumstances. Crisis moments traumatize or deeply divide society. In such a context, the primary object of the martyrdom is to restore a sense of self-esteem and a form of unity among the society; to gather all the segments of society around one central figure and to focus their attention on an unequivocally heroic fate; to unify society against the enemy, and his tragic martyrdom became the unifying narrative. Remembering martyrs is a shared icon of a common history.

Finally, a third is that the commemoration of the martyr is used to legitimate the politicians themselves. The term martyr is officially recognized by national representatives. The status of martyr appeared as one of the means to get recognition (Fouché, 2002: 126, cited in Rosoux, *ibid*, p. 110). Indeed, this concept appears to be much more dramatic than the usual notion of "victim." Here again it is noticeable that the quality of dead as "victim" or as "martyr" is not just a question of vocabulary. The conversion of a victim into a martyr is generally the business of official representation. As Agamben said, the important thing is here: This holy life, from the beginning, has a political character and is related with the land

where power in rule is established (Agamben, *ibid*, 135). The major function of it is to legitimate the state and state authority.

In that sense, one can argue that crisis moments traumatize society or deeply divide society. In such a context, the primary object of the martyrdom is to restore a sense of self-esteem and a form of unity among the society; to gather all the segments of society around one central figure and to focus their attention on an unequivocally heroic fate; to unify society against the enemy, and his tragic martyrdom became the unifying narrative. Remembering martyrs is a shared icon of a common history. This stage of the martyrdom is of crucial importance, perhaps even more crucial than the actual suffering and martyrdom itself. Those stories that have become national are among the most moving and dramatic that humanity has produced and continue to inspire people, generation after generation. Stories of glorification, as Smith (1986) underlines, are tools mostly applied in building of a nation and to build or fill the collective memory since these records of memory invite people to take lessons from the deaths for the sake of the nation's future. In this way, the martyr is granted stature and nobility out of the mouths of his own persecutors and enemies. For example, it is mostly repeated at demonstrations against PKK and terrorism in Turkey: "Martyrs do not die and our nation cannot be divided into parts."⁶ In that sense, I should look at different meanings of martyrdom in religion in order to evaluate how the concept, itself, obtained the highest prestige for individuals that people can be manipulated to die for.

Notion of Martyrdom in Religion:

Martyrdom exists as an active and powerful force in the ideology of Islam and to understand why it has such powerful roots and such great symbolic weight, it is necessary to examine the different levels at which the concept manifests itself. In Islam, martyrs are called "witnesses" because their souls witness paradise, their deaths are witnessed by angels, or their wounds will testify to their dignified status in the afterlife. To fully understand the religious and socio-political contexts of both types of martyrdom in Islam, one needs to examine their religious and historical grounds in the Qur'an and hadith.⁷ According to Saloul, in Islamic tradition, there are two main forms of martyrdom: martyrdom in war and spiritual martyrdom of asceticism.⁸

The first, martyrdom in war, is the most obvious form: someone who dies in battle for his religious belief. In Islamic history, this form is the earliest form of martyrdom and it

⁶ In Turkish, "Şehitler ölmez, vatan bölünmez."

⁷ Hadith is the documentation of Prophet Mohammed's statements and actions which were preserved from original oral transmissions. Hadith exists in a variety of degrees of reliability. While most of Hadith are accurate, some may have been fabricated, whether due to sincere misunderstandings or by devious intent. Since this project examines the religious thought of believers and not historical events, the veracity of hadith will not be an issue: a hadith reflects belief whether transmitted by a careful historian or consciously manufactured to promote an agenda. In this paper I will support my argument by using Hadith from Sahih Al-Bukhari, which is considered by the majority of Muslims as an accurate and valid collection of Hadith. Quotations from Sahih Al-Bukhari taken from the internet: Link name "Hadith Bukhari (English Translation)"; URL <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/bukhari/index.htm>.

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Available

at

<http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/i.a.m.saloul/bestanden/Martyrdom,%20gender%20and%20cultural%20identity.pdf>

is primarily related to the concept of Jihad, often translated as “holy war”.⁹ The Qur’an refers to martyrdom in war and the rewards of martyrs in many places.

And say not of those who are slain in the Way of God: 'They are dead.' Nay, they are living, though you perceive it not. Think not of those who are slain in God's way as dead. Nay they live, finding their sustenance in the Presence of their Lord....the (Martyrs) glory in the fact that on them is no fear, nor have they (cause to) grieve. They rejoice in the Grace and the Bounty from Allah. (Qur’an, 3:169-71)

The martyr is highly positioned in Islamic tradition. Thus battlefield martyrs are put in a special category as “martyrs in this world and the next” and are honored with special burial rites. The martyr’s body, in most circumstances, is not washed; he is to be buried in the clothes in which he was killed. Some hold that no prayers over the martyr are necessary since he is automatically purified from sin. The lesser categories of martyrs are “martyrs of the next world” meaning, chiefly, that they are not eligible for special burial rites but must be satisfied with divine approbation and the rewards of paradise (Berenbaum and Firesone, 2004: 140).

The second form of martyrdom is the spiritual martyrdom of asceticism. Spiritual martyrdom refers to a martyr who is killed for his/her faith or murdered while in the service of God, but who does not necessarily die in battle.¹⁰ According to Kohlberg, the category of martyrs was extended greatly after the decrease in the number of battlefield martyrs following early conquests (Cited in Berenbaum and Firesone, 2004: 141). The category of martyr was enlarged to include many kinds of death, including drowning, pleurisy, plague, or diarrhea. According to other traditions martyrs also include those who die in childbirth, those who die defending their property, those who are eaten by lions, and those who die of seasickness. The trend culminated in the transference of the value of martyrdom to other religious acts, so that death was no longer the most important prerequisite. Within this theological basis, martyrdom is portrayed as the highest privilege of Islam that contains two main sources of belief. While the first emphasizes the importance of Jihad and its different forms and meanings, the second describes the glory of the martyrdom act.

“A MOTHER OF A MARTYR” AS A RECONSTRUCTED IDENTITY

As Zisook remarks, “Mourning experience, the loss of the loved one because of death, is a universal phenomenon that most people deal with for once or more in their life time” (Cited in Olgun and Yüksel, 2001). This painful loss affects both the individual’s emotional world and social functions. In that sense, mothers, especially mothers of martyrs, are the most popular icons of nationalist discourse. However, their voices have not been heard. That is why it is important to focus on the mothers’ narratives to show how

⁹ Some writers claims that while the Qur’an frequently refers to war, the words used for war are “harb” and “qital”. Translating Jihad as “holy war” would be incorrect in this context, for the literal translation of holy war “harb muqaddasa”, is not to be found in either the Qur’an or hadith (Montgomery, 1976: 155).

¹⁰ A fuller presentation of these themes can be found in Jonah Winters, "Martyrdom in Jihad" (unpublished paper; University of Toronto, 1997). Accessed from the internet: Link name "Martyrdom in Jihad"; URL <http://bahai-library.com/personal/jw/my.papers/jihad.html>.

nationalist discourse builds “mother of martyr” as a social category, not as a social actor.

In this context, as Hall underlines, identities are constructed by different discourses, practices, and positions that intersect with each other and are antagonistic (Hall, 1996: 4). Such theories of subjectivity reject the humanist notion of a unified, fixed self that has a stable, essential core, and instead proposes the self as a site of disunity and conflict that is always in process and constructed within power relations (Weedon, 1997). The social structures and processes that shape our subjectivities are situated within discursive fields where language, social institutions, subjectivity, and power exist, intersect, and produce competing ways of giving meaning to and constructing subjectivity (De Lauretis, 1986; Weedon, 1997). Identities emerge in the midst of social relations, as constructivists argue (Cornell and Hartman, 1997: 81).

In this vein, answers for the questions of “Who are you?” or “Would you introduce yourself?” are about one’s perception of identity. It is about how you introduce yourself to someone and how you feel about yourself. In other words, perception of identity includes both “given” characteristics and an “essence,” and it also has socially constructed characteristics. As Harold R. Isaacs mentions in his book, *Idols of Tribe*, identity includes several features: common descent, shared history, and religion (Isaacs, 1989: 38). Identity may originate from either assignment by others or assertion by self. Whatever criteria are used to distinguish one’s identity from other identities, in this chapter I will focus on mothers’ narratives in order to understand how the trauma of the loss of a loved one shapes these mothers’ self-identity and their perception of motherhood.

How the Loss of A Son Shapes the Perceptions of Self-Identity of Mothers and Fathers:

There is no doubt that bereaved mothers (and other family members) are, like their sons, victims of a trauma. Is their loss any different because their sons were killed in a war rather than by disease or a car accident? In what way is this trauma a social phenomenon as well as a personal experience? After establishing the field of meanings constituted by the multiple discourses of death, I turned to a second question: What are the social effects of their sons’ martyrdom on the women as mothers? Any study of how people respond to death must also be a study of how they create their lives. Thus, a study of laments must include an inquiry into how the social practices of bereavement may contribute to maintaining a particular form of social life.

Geertz (Cited in Bora, 1998: 83) defines culture as “meaning patterns which are told from generation to generation and symbolic structures that explain attitudes and information of individuals about life.” As Bora (1998:84) points out, the “culture of motherhood” can be considered as an ideological interpretation. In this context, nationalist discourses interact with political institutions and manipulate social and cultural practices to imprint gendered identities on embodied subjects, attempting to make them malleable within the power struggles of the nation-building or nation-defending process. I aim to demonstrate the interaction of gendered discourses with normative notions of nationalism and religion in the service and reproduction of the national idea. For that reason, I attempt to learn about these mothers’ understanding of being “a mother of martyr” while beginning to ask them about “who they are.”

At first, mothers of martyrs perceived the question of “who they are” as strange and unfamiliar. After I changed the structure of the question and asked them for information about themselves, they talked about their sons and their families. For example, Ayşe (57, housewife, lost her son 13 years ago) says:

Well, I am a mother of a martyr, and a housewife. Well, how do I introduce myself? I am a mother who raises her children and sends them to school for years.

Another mother, Meryem (45, housewife, lost her son 14 years ago) says:

I am a mother of a martyr. (...) Well, I got married when I was young. I became a mother at the age of sixteen. Then, I had problems with my husband. I had problems with the father of my children. (...) As of now, I am a mother of four children.

Moreover, Ayşe Naciye (63, member of the Association of Families of Martyrs, lost her son 15 years ago) says:

I am a mother of a martyr.

As can be seen in the above quotations, each woman, first of all, defined herself within familial networks. These narratives show that those mothers perceive themselves not as independent individuals, but rather as a part of a family. Those mothers represent the conventional roles of woman. They remain loyal to conventional family bonds as altruistic mothers who care for their sons and families before themselves, before their own needs and interests. They do not consider themselves as individuals. They are, first of all, someone's mothers. It is true that they have experienced trauma, important changes in their lives and lifestyles after their sons' martyrdoms. However, they maintain the patriarchal bonds within conventional family structure.

On the other hand, for fathers of martyrs, the question of “who they are” is not an unexpected question. Furthermore, their answers include more personal information, in contrast to mothers' answers. Although they also define themselves in familial bonds, they give more priority to personal information. For example, Hamit (57, Second Chairman of the Association of Families of Martyrs, lost his son 10 years ago) defines himself:

My name is Hamit, a father of a martyr. I was born in 1950. I am from Sivas/Zara. I am retired. I have a son and a daughter.

Another father, Şükrü (65, Chairman of the Association of Families of Martyrs, lost his son 13 years ago) says:

My name is Şükrü. I am Chairman of the Association of Families of Martyrs

Moreover, Kemal (55, General Secretary of Association of Families of Martyrs, lost his son 15 years ago) says:

My name is Kemal. I was born in Artvin/Arhavi. I was born on 24 December 1953. I had three sons. My first son was also an associate officer in the same place, in the same city. Both of them went to the army voluntarily. First one was discharged and came back. Mehmet had almost

40 days to be discharged. Then, he could not come. He was martyred.

The quoted fathers are all members of the Association of Families of Martyrs. All of them are retired civil servants. However, when asked who they are, they tend to speak about themselves. It is perceived that fathers consider their self-identity to extend beyond their familial bonds. Moreover, they are aware that the answer to a question about their identity depends on their personal characteristics.

Another difference between the fathers and the mothers is that many mothers failed to give their names in their introductions. On the other hand, almost all fathers provided their names first. They knew that I knew their names; however, they still included their names first in their introductions. Mothers called themselves “mothers of martyrs” before offering their names, although they knew I had come to ask them about themselves. So then what does it mean to be the “mother of a martyr”?

What Does It Mean To Be “A Mother of a Martyr”?

In this section, my aim is not to give a clear definition of what a “mother of a martyr” is or is not; rather I want to provide a picture of what it means to be such a mother, by the actions and practices of the mothers themselves. I argue that those mothers’ identities are constructed through nationalist discourse and religion, as Hall claims that each subject position is a reflection of a discursive practice. Mothers of martyrs are constructed in accordance with conventional gender roles, and the structure demands that they apply those roles in being a mother of a martyr. Giving meanings, by nationalist and religious discourse, to death by martyrdom transforms those mothers as “mothers of martyrs” and endows them with a special status both in society and in religion.

First, in the discourse of nationalism or the recreation of an “imagined community,” it is crucial to build national consciousness. The transference of personal motives and meanings to public and political symbols contributes to an understanding and explanation of a martyr’s death. Before, they were only “ordinary” housewives, but with their sons’ martyrdom, they have become “mothers of the nation,” known by all and respected by statesmen and commanders. They have found themselves in new roles and new subject positions. As a result of this, these mothers answer the question above by stating, “I’m a mother of a martyr.” First and foremost, the factor defining their identities is that they are mothers of martyrs.

As indicated above, while martyrdom sanctifies and glorifies the martyr in social and religious realms, it also provides prestige for the relatives of martyrs, especially for their mothers. When I began to look carefully at the ways people talked about death, the crucial role of one element—religious faith—became apparent. Like the discourse of honor, religious discourse builds itself on lamentation. Faith in God has to be seen, for men and women, as another moral register in which to read people’s practices. This construction of religion’s place has two consequences. First, it enables mournfulness to become a special statement about the meaning of death. When women lament and wail, they are accepting God’s will. Second, this configuration makes people’s responses to death relevant to their

social standing. This is where the gendering of the discourses of death becomes significant. Like the code of honor, religious faith provides for mothers of martyrs a principle of social differentiation, a standard by which people can be ranked. They benefit from these principles. Through such enactments of piety they offset some of the negative effects of their inability (because of their economic dependence).

In that sense, martyrdom, as it is discussed above, is a sanctified and exalted event in the eyes of religion. It is believed that both the martyr and his family will be comfortable in the afterlife. They will be rewarded by God. This is a way to cope with the loss of a son: to achieve something sanctified, special, and prestigious in religion. Mothers own this prestige obtained by their sons' death after martyrdom. By making these mothers comfortable, it also provides them socially important status. Before, these mothers were only ordinary housewives; after martyrdom, they were recognized and remembered by important statesmen, politicians, and commanders. Prestige obtained by martyrdom is not limited to religion. It also has a social side. "Dying for the sake of the nation" is the highest status that can be obtained by those soldiers. Dying for the sake of the nation, providing an important service for society, assures this respected status for the martyr and his family. This newly obtained social and religious prestige makes up for the loss of family, especially for mothers. In this way, life after martyrdom becomes more bearable.

Comparison of Sunni Mothers with Alevi Mothers:

In light of this understanding of martyrdom, why are Alevi mothers affected by the idea of martyrdom, defining themselves as mothers of martyrs, when they do not believe in an afterlife like Sunni mothers do? There are, I consider, two major reasons for this. First, like Sunni mothers, Alevi mothers must deal with the sudden loss of their beloved sons. This death is seen as pointless, because those mothers were waiting for their sons to return home at the end of their military service. The situation is especially tragic because it usually involves a young man of about twenty. It is perhaps the suddenness of these deaths that makes it so terrible at first, because without any logical reason or warning, a mother has lost her son. Mothers, whether Alevi or Sunni, claim that this pain cannot be understood by one who has not experienced it. The only way to cope with the pain is by glorifying the death in an attempt to give meaning and prestige to the martyrdom. The mothers' narratives present various ways to make sense of a senseless death. Alevi mothers give meaning to this sudden death not by religion, as Sunni mothers do, but rather by nationalism, emphasizing that their sons died for the sake of the nation. Alevi mothers do not place so much importance religious benefits of martyrdom, such as the son and his family being rewarded in heaven, because they do not perceive death as an end. It is easily seen in the narratives of Alevi mothers that they call themselves "mothers of martyrs" because their sons died protecting the nation; in nationalist discourse, such a man is called a "martyr."

Second, rituals related to death can vary among Alevis depending on whether they live in the city or the country, or due to their level of education. Because Alevi doctrine is based on oral, rather than written, history, and lacks "certain rules," as in other faiths, due to differences between city life and country life, and regional demographics, it can be said that Alevis develop different rituals and beliefs about death. Most importantly, when they migrate to the cities, Alevi people have to apply to the municipality for their funeral or death rituals, because Alevi houses of gathering (*cemevi*) are not officially accepted as responsible for such work, not being officially recognized as places of worship. Therefore, the tradition of

mosques and imams has started to enter Alevi practice, though not an original part of Alevi doctrine. Secularization did not, however, bode the end of the widespread Sunni prejudices against the Alevis. The Alevis' gradual integration into the wider society, along with their movement to the towns and entry into education and careers in public service, brought them into closer contact, and sometimes into direct competition, with Sunnis. The official attitude toward Islam since 1980 has represented an even greater departure from the Kemalist tradition, actively fostering a Turkish-Islamic synthesis that began as a doctrine combining fervent Turkish nationalism and Islamic sentiment. Religious education, previously an optional subject, was made obligatory; the Directorate of Religious Affairs was strengthened; numerous new mosques were built and imams were appointed, not only in Sunni towns and villages, but also in Alevi communities. Alevis no longer had a unique religion to which they could turn, because the institutions of traditional Alevi thought were almost entirely eroded. Alevis are not allowed to learn their own values and rituals. Consequently, Sunni beliefs fill the gaps where Alevi thought is missing in Alevis' lives. As an unavoidable result of assimilation, Sunni beliefs have blended into Alevi beliefs. Additionally, although Alevis have a fear of assimilation and criticize the state politics that cause this process, Sunni beliefs or rituals can still become dominant in their daily life, despite the fact that those rituals or ideas are not indigenous to Alevi thought. Martyrdom is the best example of this. Although Sunnis and Alevis have different beliefs, they live side by side in cities. Naturally, they can affect each other. As the state continues to impose Sunni beliefs on Alevis, it is impossible for Alevi mothers to not be impressed by Sunni views of martyrdom; nothing else exists to give meaning to their sons' sudden deaths.

To sum up, if we consider the link between gender and nationalism, we face motherhood as a significantly subjective identity, either supporting nationalism or challenging it. Since the 1980s, in southeast Turkey, an armed struggle has been raging between the PKK and the Turkish army. In this process, mothers enter the public sphere with different demands. Most mothers of martyrs have been seen in the public sphere internalizing patriotism and nationalism in order to support the Turkish army demand of revenge for their dead sons. In that context, I believe that motherhood has a critical identity role in Turkey, in constantly producing militarism. The most crucial role of women is, from the beginning of the nation-building process, to raise children suitable for a militarist, nationalist and patriarchal structure, or, in other words, to be a mother. The mother who has lost her son in a war, defending the homeland, has been one of the most powerful images of hegemonic nationalist culture. In public discourse, the mother frequently represents the nation itself. Therefore, a mother cannot demand a right to her son's life and cannot question his loss in war, since, as a mother of the nation, she gave birth to a son of the nation, and whenever the nation asks for him, she should give him up. The individual loss of each son is also a collective, national loss. While held up as public symbols, however, bereaved mothers of the martyrs are silenced by society, their voices not to be heard. For both mothers and fathers, the highest level of valor is in carrying their pain in silence.

In this sense, the focus on mothers of martyrs has increased, and they are seen more often in the media, on television and in newspapers, in Turkey. A particularly common scene involves a mother crying at the funeral of her son, shouting that, if she had another son, she would send him to war, too, while cursing the PKK. There are many other expressions of this trend. Women speak in public, in emotional and personal terms, about their sons. Many mothers resent ready-made clichés of national language concerning the tragedy of their sons.

In other words, women, as mothers, are taking their rightful place as mourners of their sons, and in doing so, they reproduce the entire discourse around death in nationalism. Funerals of martyrs are rituals that enact a linkage between mothering, death and sacrifice, and the nation in a way that publicly states and validates the mothers' moral and political standing. Attendees at funerals give a chorus of public, mournful recognition to maternal feelings of loss and also assuage that loss by symbolically supporting the mother. For example, mothers of martyrs demonstrated for the capital punishment of Abdullah Öcalan. One of those women was a nurse, Yıldız.¹¹ The public met her as a proud but pained woman, the widow of a petty officer martyred by the PKK. It is expected that these women, like all other female citizens of Turkey, will obey the prototype for the ideal woman figure, as determined by the elite men who shaped womanhood during the nation-building process (Kandiyoti, 1997). On the other hand, for those mothers, acceptance of their situation transforms their narratives of loss into narratives of resurgence. They experience a transition of self-identity, from "poor, repressed women," to "proud, patriotic women."

In that sense, when those women come into public sphere with their motherhood identity, they do not question unequal woman-man power relations based on religion and nationalism. They cannot transform their objective position to subjective position. They depend on being the wife of a man and mother of a son. Glorification of motherhood prevents those women to participate in the public sphere as collective actors although those mothers, especially mothers of martyrs, have the chance of shaping politics by inspiring from their own experiences and lives. As Olgun and Yüksel said, for parents, the death of their grown up son is the hardest loss from which to recover. However, they claim effects of mourning are not limited with parents' emotional worlds. It affects their social relations, too (Olgun and Yüksel: 2001: 41). Almost twenty years of war in Turkey reflects as a trauma to the lives of mothers who lost their sons in the war. Politics of war politicize women, or rather, make them the "tools" or the "victims" of war politics. Moreover, this "politicization" that is constructed over motherhood help to deepen the arguments of politicians about the Kurdish question and national security.

Mothers' Perception of National Security after Death of Their Sons:

Turkey is constructed as a militaristic nation through discourses of Turkish history. As a result, military service is an unavoidable duty for men in society until recently; a man who does not fulfill his military service is not accepted as a citizen of Turkey. While motherhood is a way for women to symbolically establish their citizenship, military service was a way for men to establish their own citizenship, since every Turk, supposedly, is born a soldier.¹² These mothers sent their young sons, between the ages of 20 and 25, to serve the state. While waiting for the sons to come home at the end of their military service, the women are suddenly confronted with grief and loss (*evlat acısı*): their sons have become martyrs. These mothers do not send their sons away to the war, but rather to the state. When their sons died for their duty to the state, mothers did not perceive their sons' service negatively, as a kind of violence. On the contrary, these mothers are proud of their sons' military service for the religious and nationalist reasons I discussed above. As a result, mothers hang up pictures of their sons in uniform everywhere in the house as a prestige

¹¹ For more information, see <http://www.savaskarsitlari.org/arsiv.asp?ArsivTipID=1&ArsivAnaID=37079>

¹² In Turkey, apart from citizenship, if a man does not fulfill his military service, he cannot easily get married or find a job.

symbol. Plaques of service, medallions, and certificates of success are also displayed. It is easily seen in the mothers' narratives that the military conditions were not perceived as war conditions. They simply sent their sons to the state. So, for those mothers, the patriarchal values framing this structure are not perceived as problematic.

The only way they can cope with the loss is to attribute a certain value and prestige to their sons' deaths, sanctified by religion. They create special meaning in "martyrdom" to make sense of their loss. Mothers describe their sons' deaths as "destiny, predestination." They often ended their interviews with comments such as, "his fate (*nasib*)," "his life span was short," or "when a person's life is up..." In their narratives, the women explored the various ways to make sense of a senseless death. In the end, they believe, a person's time of death is God-given or "written." Most essential to faith is an acceptance of God's will. All the mothers I interviewed, including Alevis, hold that a person's time of death is determined in advance by God; some say it is "written on his or her forehead." For instance, Meryem (45, housewife, lost her son 14 years ago) says:

May God rest his soul, there is nothing to do. Is it written on forehead or is it God's will? However, there is another point that if you believe in God and in martyrdom, at the end, this is written on your forehead. There is nothing to do.

War enters their mind with the death of their sons and is understood as a sole event: terrorism. The women's stories and commentaries implied, on the one hand, that blame for the death could be traced to human decisions or actions, or that their sons had died because of the actions of the PKK. At the same time, they believe that all that happens, especially death, is God's will. Thus, on one hand, these mothers do not question the deaths of their sons. On the other hand, they ask for revenge from the state since their sons died for the sake of the nation's security. Discourse of martyrdom in religion placates people. It is something that relieves the mothers from their suffering. It is a soothing thing, and its promises of spiritual opulence helps mothers cope with the deaths. When people cannot explain what is happening around them or to them on rational grounds, they are likely to turn to traditional, religious analyses and remedies. Generally, these mothers are unable to explain rationally what has happened to their sons, and they tend to seek explanations within soothing religious traditions. As a natural result of this, these mothers are politically silenced with a focus on "heroism" or "martyrdom." Although their sons' deaths seem senseless to these mothers, the loss of a son does not demolish the legitimacy of the state in their eyes. On the contrary, martyrdom with nationalist discourse and sanctification by religion only strengthens the mothers' bonds with the state.

Another interesting point is that in the case of mothers of martyrs, they are not only the ones having grief but, in some situations, these mothers are asking for revenge for their sons' deaths. Moreover, these mothers, especially mothers of petty officers or officers, want their grandsons to become officers or petty officers and give the necessary punishment for those who killed their dads. After martyrdom, sons of martyrs become particularly special to their mothers; sons of martyrs are seen as the ones who will take revenge for their fathers' death. When we consider the sons of the martyrs, the sons have not entered the military for financial reasons. Sons of martyrs, members of the Turkish Army Force, apply to military school for "revenge" for the death of their fathers. As a result, these mothers are willing to sacrifice other sons, if necessary.

In this sense, when I asked these mothers what they think about peace for the conflict in the East and Southeast of Turkey, they got surprised because, until now, they have never been asked what they think about. Mostly, instead of these women, their husbands deal with the problems. As a result, the concept of peace does not make sense for their minds. When I asked the mothers to suggest solutions for the conflict in southeastern Turkey, they said that the solution should come from the political institutions. But the lack of a connection between political institutions and the women makes the words of the mothers “apolitical” (Sancar, 2001). While the mothers’ words do show a true search for an understanding of a solution, they do not hold the power or responsibility to actualize such a solution. Their identity as mothers provides them the ability to speak in the public sphere, but only about their sons. Apart from that topic, mothers remain passive and powerless in the decision-making process. The politicization of mothers reproduces the “victimhood” of women insofar as it fails to cooperate with a political movement against violence, militarism, and exploitation.

Conclusion:

By exploring the narratives of mothers of martyrs, this study first gave an understanding about being a mother of martyr within nationalism in Turkey, where patriarchal values dominate. It is evident that patriarchal society’s underlying ideology influences women’s evaluations of mothers of martyrs, and also their self-evaluations in terms of ideal mothering qualities. Moreover, it can be said that the influence of martyrdom reshapes women’s daily lives and identity. Second, it is seen that all mothers attribute great worth to being a mother of a martyr, although more than half of them believe that a woman is not given any independent value by society in general. Related to this fact, social and personal responsibilities on the part of the mothers of martyrs was emphasized by most mothers. The feelings of pride and sanctity are common among mothers.

The above narratives have made immensely valuable contributions to our understanding of the relations between women, nationalism, security and war, and of the construction of militarism through notions of motherhood and masculinity and their impact on women’s lives. They have also produced key analytical frameworks and tools through which women’s experiences and the relevance of martyrdom have been approached. This approach often assumes a direct link between women’s agency and women’s participation in the public sphere, and understands the discourse of war as potentially empowering, especially when linked to the support of nationalist movements. This research on the militarization of mothers’ lives, be it militarization through direct relations with the military, or militarization through family associations, relied on the concept of women’s agency and empowerment. However, as I argue, mothers’ presence in the public sphere or politics does not seem to change the masculine nature of these institutions, nor does it contribute to a general advancement of the mothers’ social positions. It does not tear away the legitimizing camouflage that has sustained martyrdom as a symbol of national pride and security.

Depending on the conditions, motherhood is either sanctified or degrading. In the case of mothers of martyrs, these mothers are sanctified in double ways. On one hand, they are nationalist icons of the war. On the other hand, they are sanctified in religion by being

rewarded with heaven. These women invoke the other discourses: references to God's will or letting the men in the family/the army talk instead of themselves. In that sense, they are valuable tools to justify policies of either the army or the governments about national security in Turkey. As a result of this research, I claim that, while mothers' roles do change in war, even dramatically, and mothers do take on new responsibilities within the household, community, or organizations. Instead, war is actually used to preserve gender roles and order in Turkey. War, martyrdom, and nationalism become means of preserving, achieving, and reclaiming dominant masculinity as well as dominant gender hierarchies based on national security issues. From the interviews, it is seen that as a consequence of being a mother of a martyr, these women gain the right to become visible, publicly known, and to participate in the public sphere. However, they use this right not as an individual or as a woman, but by depending on their newly gained identity of national motherhood. In short, with their sons' martyrdom, they have begun to exist in the public sphere for the first time, gaining public respect. However, this transformation, from ordinary housewives to mothers of martyrs, is used to justify the discourse on national security issues. They do not question what happened, or why. They are seen in the public sphere, but not as individuals. They are seen as mournful mothers, speaking of the glories of their sons, both in the past and at the present.

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