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**Narratives of Home: Home-making practices and Political Violence
in a Kurdish Border Town in Turkey**

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Report

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family.

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Abstract

Narratives of Home: Home-making practices and Political Violence in a Kurdish Border Town in Turkey

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This essay analyzes a series of home narratives I gathered in Yüksekova (*Gever* in Kurdish) district of Hakkari (*Colemêrg*), a small Kurdish town located on the Iraqi-Turkish border. This essay presents and discusses the ways in which people have been struggling to create, maintain, and talk about their homes during and after a series of violent moments that have marked the local time-space of Yüksekova over the last century. Drawing an ethnographic picture of survival and home-making practices, I will trace the changing semantics of home and the social/spatial relationships and cultural imaginaries associated with it. To this end, I will focus on home-making in three violent moments in the cultural and political history of the town that are most emphasized in the narratives I gathered: 1) The massacre and deportation of Armenian and other non-Muslim peoples of Hakkari in 1915 that turned the region into a home only for Muslim Kurds 2) the destruction of homes as rural Kurds of Hakkari were displaced as a part of the recent counterinsurgency warfare against Kurdish guerillas; and 3) the struggles of people to make homes in Yüksekova. Informed by a body of literature on space that defines space meaningfully only in and through social relations, this paper aims to take an ethnographic look at home as a space that is situated in human agency and practices and which is open to change as it is shaped and reshaped as part of the dynamism of social, political and daily life.

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Introduction

Wars, armed conflicts and rebellions are rarely fought only at the battleground. Rather, they find their way into and shatter the “intimate” domain of the home in a variety of ways. That is why reproducing and maintaining their home, or the sense of an intimate sociality created in and around the home is often a most important aim for those living under conditions of war or its aftermath.

This essay analyzes a series of home narratives I gathered in Yüksekova (Gever in Kurdish) district of Hakkari (Colemêrg), a small Kurdish town located on the Iraqi-Turkish border in 2007. I will present and discuss the ways in which people have been struggling to create, maintain and talk about their homes during and after a series of violent moments that have marked the local time-space of Yüksekova over the last century. Drawing an ethnographic picture of survival and home-making practices, I will trace the changing semantics of home and the social/spatial relationships and cultural imaginaries associated with it. To this end, I will focus on home-making in three violent moments in the cultural and political history of the town that are most emphasized in the narratives I gathered: 1) The genocidal destruction and deportation of Armenian and other non-Muslim peoples of Hakkari in 1915 that turned the region into a home only for Muslim Kurds 2) the destruction of homes as rural Kurds of Hakkari were displaced as a part of the recent counterinsurgency warfare against Kurdish guerillas; and 3) the struggles of people to make homes in Yüksekova.

In the narratives I gathered “home” is referred to with two terms: xanî and mal. While in Kurdish xani refers to house as a physical structure rather than a social

context, mal is similar to the English usage of home versus house. More precisely, the latter means both physical residence and the kin who share the same residence. Unlike xani, mal carries additional meanings such as wealth, family, household and lineage, which includes a group of people claiming descent from a common ancestor and maintaining joint rights of inheritance over properties and pastures (Yalcin-Heckmann, 1991). Although membership of a mal is considered a prerequisite for inheritance rights, it does not necessarily designate an economic unit. The local use of the term emphasizes the kin unit living together and led by a male, such as malê Ferzinde or malê Nisret. Hence, mal includes and defines a set of kin-based social relationships organized in and around a residence, providing a rich analytical trajectory to understand the social life of the region.

Taking up the home as a key site where relationships among space, society and power interact and mutually constitute each other, the series of home narratives gathered in Yüksekova will be analyzed with regards to two questions: How have the home and its local imaginaries in Yüksekova been transformed through the histories of violence over the last century? How have this violence and other power relationships permeated everyday life and the “intimate” space of home, shaping subjectivities and socialities?

Home, Space, Home as Space

The last two decades have witnessed the proliferation of research on the meaning and experience of home in social sciences as well as in cultural geography and architecture. Similarly, there has been an increasing intellectual engagement with social space as a crucial site to analyze power, struggle and subjectivity. This essay is

informed by the critical scholarship on these two fields, combining their insights into an analytical frame to assess home and space-making practices amidst violent socio-political transformations and everyday life survival in Yüksekova.

Home has been variously discussed in terms of place, space, affect/feeling, practices and/or an active state of being in the world. One theme in these debates is home as a physical entity. It is important, however, to understand the relationship between home as a physical entity and home as a set of social practices/relationships by situating them in varying cultural and historical contexts.

Some scholars have portrayed home as a space where people find comfort and relaxation (Moore, 1984). This understanding is based on the distinction between public and private spheres, or the inside and outside world (Wardhaugh, 1999). According to this dichotomous logic, the inside or private domain is a place of comfort, security and relaxation. This “intimate” realm is clearly distinguished from the public space, portrayed as out of the reach of public scrutiny and surveillance. While the public space is portrayed as the realm of politics, reason and production, the private is the sphere of familial relations, of emotion, leisure, reproduction and/or freedom (Bachelard, 1969; Darke, 1994). Feminist scholarship has provided the most pertinent critiques of these reifying and often romanticizing ideas on home.

By counterpoising the inside with the outside space, Julia Wardhaugh, for example, contests the representation of home as place of safety (1999). According to her, associating comfort, refuge and security with the inside is misleading in the experiences of most women of the world. Likewise, she maintains, peril, fear, anxiety and insecurity are not human situations necessarily situated in the outside world. Like

Bell Hooks (1991), Sara Ahmed (1999) and Doreen Massey (1992), Wardhaugh claims that home may not be a safe and comfortable space of belonging with predetermined and rigid boundaries that separate it from the public space.

Writing about the experiences and meanings of home for African-American women and women of color in general, other feminist scholars argued that home can be a site of oppression and subordination for women. Kimberle Crenshaw, for example, discusses home as a site of repression and disempowerment for women of color, who suffer from intersecting discriminations based on race and gender (Crenshaw, 1991). Bell Hooks (1991) also acknowledges the home as a potential site of patriarchal oppression for African-American women, emphasizing that home is not a politically neutral place. However, Hooks also recognizes that for African-American men and women who are marginalized in the American public space, home can also be a site for radical activity, a space of alternative ways of imagining the society.

Scholars in cultural studies and anthropology also studied the notion and sense of home, especially in the context of migration, refugees, the homeless and people's relations with the lived space. Sara Ahmed focuses on home and being at home as a matter of affect or feeling. For her, home can be approached in terms of the presence or absence of particular feelings. Describing the experience of 'being-at-home' through a phenomenological approach, Ahmed claims to view home not as a noun but a (stative) verb; as a state of being that is not necessarily delimited by a physical location (Jackson, 1995). Other phenomenological analyses conceive home as the lived experience of locality (Brah, 1996), claiming that the locality infuses into the self through the senses, through what one smells, hears, touches, feels or remembers.

In this process, the self also infuses himself/herself into the locality. Hence, the boundaries between home and self and between home and outside world become permeable. In such phenomenological accounts, the aim is not to define the essence of home or delineate people's experience. Rather than privileging the ways people think about home, these accounts focus on practice, on the diverse ways in which people “do” and feel home (Gurney, 1997; Ingold, 1995; Jackson, 1995). Such accounts invite us to situate the home in the dialectical relationship between self and object in the production of home, according 'epistemological status to the subject's meanings and experience' (Somerville, 1997).

In traditional social science literature, space is considered as an abstract dimension or an empty container in which human activities and events occur. One implication of such a perspective is that events, actions and spaces are conceptually and physically separate from each other, and only accidentally related. This approach tends to reduce space to a plain, power neutral dimension, negating any mutually constitutive relationship among space, agency and social meaning. Thus, space is something that can be objectively measured in terms of an abstracted geometry of scale. It is nothing but a simple surface for action; a neutral and passive dimension outside of the social structures of power and domination; a container that is external to human affairs.

The alternative view considers space as a medium rather than a container for action/practice, something that is produced in and cannot be thought without action. As such, space cannot exist apart from the events and activities through which it embodies its reality. Space is socially produced, bearing the marks of competing

social tendencies, groups and individuals in contexts structured by asymmetrical relations of power (Low & Lawrence-Zunigais, 2003). Space in itself is not a meaningful term; that is, there is no space per se, only spaces that are produced in and through social relations. Hence, spaces are always already situated in human agency and practice and open to change as they are shaped and reshaped as part of the dynamism of social, political and daily life. As such, space is both the medium and product of action, or, better, a constitutive element of social action that both constrains and enables social life. Rather than being uniform and static, social spaces provide dynamic and often contradictory settings for the creation of meaning and life .

The meanings of space always involve a subjective dimension and cannot be understood apart from the symbolically constructed worlds of differently situated social actors. What space is depends on who is experiencing it and how. That is why spatial experience is neither innocent nor neutral, but shaped in and through multiple axes of domination and subordination such as class, race or gender. And because of this multiplicity in its production, spatial experiences constitute an often conflict-ridden medium through which individuals act and/or are acted upon (Lefebvre, 1991).

The other point to note is the relationship between space and time. As Doreen Massey (1994) argues, the experience of space is intertwined with different temporalities, as spaces are created and transformed in relation to previously constructed spaces that bear the marks of the past. Spaces are also intimately related to the formation of individual and social biographies: Hence, “space must be conceptualized integrally with time [...] the aim should be to think always in terms of space-time” (D. Massey, 1994b, 2). Criticizing the traditional juxtaposition of time

with space, Massey states that time is typically defined by change, movement, and history, while space is perceived as stasis, a lack of dynamism and history. She invites us to view space always in motion, as an ever changing production thoroughly embedded in the dynamism of time.

Understanding space as a constantly changing production inscribed by traces of time and home as a space without a fixed meaning and predetermined boundaries between the public and the private, I will trace the production and transformations of the experience and semantics of “home as space” in relation to individual and communal histories of violence and survival in Yüksekova.

Research Site and Context

A town of Hakkari, Yüksekova is located on a very high plain surrounded by mountains at the very Southeast corner of Anatolia. Apart from Turkish military troops, police and a few civil servants, the town’s population is totally composed of Kurds. Despite this Kurdish character of its current demographic structure, Hakkari has historically been a demographically mixed region inhabited by Muslim Kurds and non-Muslim populations such as the Christian Armenians, Nestorians (Assyrians) and Chaldeans. Since the treaty of Kasr-ı Şirin between Ottoman Empire and the Safavids of Iran in 1639, the area has been a frontier zone among Ottoman/Turkish, Persian and Arab political formations. The region, also known as Colemerg among the Kurds, was the center of autonomous Kurdish principalities (emirates) until the nineteenth century (Bruinessen, 1992). The establishment of Turkish, Persian and Arab nation-states in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the concomitant creation of borders have dramatically transformed socio-cultural and political life in this

border city (Yalcin-Heckmann, 1991). While previously an autonomous contact zone among diverse native peoples, modernization and nationalization have radically changed both the demographic structure of Hakkari as well as its forms of cultural and political life.

The Ottoman Empire's centralization policies ended the rule of Kurdish principalities in the nineteenth century, replacing Kurdish rulers (emirs) with centrally appointed bureaucrats. This not only destroyed the autonomous administrative structure in Kurdistan but also undermined those local social structures that had brought together diverse Kurdish tribes and non-Muslim populations. Since then, the relations among local populations as well as those between the Kurds and the Ottoman/Turkish regimes have been marked with tension, mostly in the form of a cycle of rebellion and repression, which at times culminated in genocidal practices (Jwaideh, 2006). In the absence of emirs, Kurdish sheikhs started enjoying significant power and authorities in Hakkari and its vicinity. In fact, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed a series of Kurdish uprisings organized and led by these Kurdish sheiks and tribal chiefs. Particularly significant in this violent process of transformation were Sheik Ubeydullah-i Nêhri and Situ Agha of the Oramarî tribe.

Another particularly important fact in the local history of Hakkari is the gradual destruction of its native non-Muslim populations (Armenians, Nestorians and Chaldeans) by the Ottoman and Turkish authorities as well as by Kurdish emirs and tribal chiefs. The massacre of Nestorians by Kurdish Bedirxan Beg in the late 1840s has a living presence in local memory. The Ottoman treatment of such populations was particularly repressive, which culminated in the genocidal destruction and en

masse deportation of Nestorians, Cealdeans and Armenians in 1915-16. It was through such tragic events that Hakkari became a town populated by the Kurds but ruled by the Turkish state in the course of the twentieth century.

Local Kurdish uprisings continued after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 as a response to increasing state intrusion in the region and repressive campaigns of cultural assimilation. As one of the most mountainous regions of Kurdistan, Hakkari became a particularly strategic war-zone after the Kurdistan Workers' Party initiated guerilla warfare in 1984. The city remained under state of emergency rule between 1980 and 2003. In this period, many local people were killed – guerillas, activists, politicians and civilians. Rural Hakkari was almost totally depopulated after 1991 as part of a counter-insurgency strategy, except for those places inhabited by the “village-guards”, who are Kurdish paramilitary forces sponsored by the Turkish state. Consequently, tens of thousands of rural Kurds who were living around Yüksekova migrated to the town center in the last two decades. The population of the city nearly tripled. Having left their land and possessions behind and without any compensation from the state, these rural Kurds joined the jobless and/or the informal economy of Yüksekova. As a result of this forced exodus, animal husbandry and agriculture, the main economic activities of the region, came to a halt. The sudden influx of the displaced created significant social and economic problems in the town, particularly in terms of unemployment and housing. Consequently, the informal economy grew and new living quarters were built without necessary infrastructure. In this process of dislocation, as kinship and neighborhood ties relatively lost their previous significance, Kurdish nationalism became a main

channel through which both the new and old residents of the town began producing new socialities and subjectivities.

As a politically vibrant and geographically mountainous region suitable for guerilla activities, Yüksekova became a central target both for the Kurdish movement and the Turkish state. A significant number of Yüksekova youth joined the ranks of the PKK after 1991. As a response the state increased militarist pressures and surveillance, turning the town into a genuine battlefield. Multiple forms of violence became routinized and deeply reshaped everyday life in the form of frequent curfews, house raids, arbitrary arrests, systematic torture, disappearances, informant networks, destroyed families, exiles, unemployment and violent dispossession (Aker, 2008). Under such circumstances, while home-making became a particularly difficult task, the relations between home and outside as well as between people and their spatial environment have been radically reconfigured. Often times, homes turned into particularly terrorizing spaces that no longer provided any privacy or protection, as insurgency and counter-insurgency permeated daily life and captured bodies and populations in a space where the law was literally suspended.

While the state of emergency rule was officially lifted in 2003, it has remained intact in practice. And although armed conflict has lost its intensity in the last decade, its institutions, effects and traces are still very much prevalent. During my research, people routinely relayed stories of loss and suffering inundated by violence. Stories of destroyed homes, disrupted families, and the efforts to create new homes and families had a peculiar and striking presence. How people narrate and/or reconstruct home as a constantly changing space will be a central analytical focus of this essay. In this,

however, I do not recognize these people as simply objectified victims of violence/oppression, but active subjects in search of ways and means to repair and reconstruct their homes and families towards survival.

The narratives of home that follow will be analyzed in terms of three ways in which home becomes an object, site and product of narration. First, in these stories home becomes a central organizing and articulating theme to remember and reconstruct the fact of forced displacement and a longing for home and the past. Second, many people narrate “home” by drawing certain boundaries to make its inside and outside clear. This is often the case when they want to unmask the ways in which state violence has intervened into and transformed their “private” spaces. A significant emphasis in some of these stories is how under state violence people lose control over their homes and are afraid of staying at home. Third, in still other stories, home turns into a space where people are coerced to stay due to armed conflicts, curfews or arrests. In these stories, home transforms into a terrorizing prison-like space where the boundaries between “inside” and “outside” and “the political” and “daily life” collapse.

Chapter 1:

Displacement and Homemaking

The chapter traces one story on the forced displacement of Kurdish villagers in Yüksekova. Situating this story into the local history, I will center on the traces of the past and home-making or the inability of doing so as they are inscribed in space and articulated in language. The story is that of Xelil¹, a sixty nine years old member of the Oremari *aşiret* (tribe). Xelil is married, the father of three daughters and seven sons. I met Xelil, when I and my friend Zeki went to Yüksekova district branch of the Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi – DTP).²

During my fieldwork Zeki helped me greatly especially in securing contacts with the villagers who were displaced during the 1990s. He was a twenty-year-old high school graduate. Like most of his peers, he was very much interested in the political life of the region. He had close relations with the youth and as well as those who enjoyed important power positions in local institutions. Because of my long stay away from there, many times I felt like a stranger in my own hometown. However, thanks to Zeki, I was able to re-immense myself into the political and daily life in Yüksekova.

Since I had left the town for Istanbul to pursue undergraduate studies, Yüksekova became one of the most active and persistent site of street protests in

¹ Throughout this study, I am going to use pseudonyms for my interlocutors to respect their privacy and to consider their security.

² DTP is considered to be the political successor of Democratic People's Party (DEHAP) and other previously banned Kurdish political parties. In December 2009, like its predecessors, DTP was also banned by the Turkish Constitutional Court on charges of having links with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Turkey's Kurdish region, particularly from 2004 onwards. Youths were the most dynamic group who ensured the continuity of these often violent political activities. Some call this span of time as the longest civil disobedience period in Yüksekova. Zeki has been part of these protests. Once he made this interesting comment with a smile on his face: "Omer, if you want to understand what is going to happen in the city, just look at the colors of my clothes. If I wear colorful clothes, it means that there won't be any demonstration that day, but if I wear darkish clothes, then you should expect something."³

It was a cold January day, when I and Zeki, who fortunately had colorful clothes that day, visited the Yüksekova district branch of DTP to meet some displaced villagers. Eight old men were sitting around a heating stove at the corner of a big meeting room. All of them were above sixty and each of them was from a different village. While greeting each other with slightly different Kurdish accents, I could somehow figure out where each of them was from. A youth member of the party kindly served us tea, which helped feel warmer. Zeki introduced me to them. Our conversation did not last long that day, but Xelil invited me to his place to have a longer conversation.

Next day, together with Zeki, we went to Xelil's place in a neighborhood where houses and streets were all covered with a thick layer of snow as if a big white blanket. The snow looked beautiful, but it still could not conceal the squalidness and poverty of the neighborhood. Most of the houses of there were built by the displaced

³ Such clothing practices gained significance especially after the amendments made on Anti-Terror Law in April 2006, which paved the way to prosecute any person (including children) who joins protests, throws stones at the police or covers his/her face as members of the PKK. Under such circumstances, the clothes one wears could raise suspicion, and Zeki, like all of his peers, was well aware of this.

villagers who had moved from Oremar region of Yüksekova after 1990. Houses were more or less similar. They were one-storey adobe buildings with small windows to secure protection from both cold weather and bullets when there were armed conflicts. The neighborhood had no infrastructure, running water and sewage system.

Xelil and his wife Sultan had a dilapidated one-bedroom house. They warmly welcomed us and took us to the living room. Except for the worn out carpets covering the floor, the room was almost completely empty. At the center of the room was the only heating stove of the house, which was surrounded by folded mattresses. We sat in front of the small windows which let some daylight into room. Sultan was fifty seven years old, but she looked much older with deep wrinkles on her hands and face. She offered us “smuggled tea” just brewed on the stove.

Xelil seemed to have a lot to tell. I was planning to conduct a semi-structured interview towards learning about his life story, but he started telling me his story as the following:

My life is the combination of the things that I have seen with these eyes and the things I heard from my father. My father said that in 1914, as Turks say “bin dokuz yuz on dort”, if I am not wrong, Sultan Abdulhamit rang the knell of Armenians. Maybe, Armenians in Van or in Dogubeyazit made some mistakes, but Armenians in Hakkari were poor, they were under our control. Sîtu was the agha of Oramarites. He endorsed the Ottoman authority and attacked the Armenians in his region. In the May of nineteen fourteen, the assault started and continued for months. The first attack was held on the village of Zêrê (the central non-Muslim village in Oremar). The name of the leader of Armenians was Melik Xemo. I have also seen his manor. It was a big three-storey manor. Melik Xemo many times told Sîtu, “Don’t fight with us, don’t exterminate us, don’t expel us from our territory. Zêrê is the central pole; it is the central pole of Oremar region. If the central pole is burnt, the house will also burn.”

I was not expecting such an introduction. Xelil’s narrative was not in the form of an

autobiographical life story. Instead, he re-constructed a communal story with local knowledges that have been ignored in official histories and written accounts. Interestingly, he started “his life story” not from his childhood memories; but from the genocidal destruction of Armenians, a story that was transmitted to him by his father, and, probably, also by other elders of his village. The temporal order of the story, the emphasis on 1914, might sound chronological, but I listened to the story more as an apocalyptical temporality, a destroyed time-space to where he would later anchor his own story.

Xelil thus located the beginning of his life story in the moment when they (Oremari Tribe) settled into the region. The story of the Oremari tribe’s turning the region into their home is indexed with the simultaneous expulsion and destruction of the non-Muslims who were native to the region. A striking motive in Xelil's story, as I detail later, was his constant reference to the notion of home. His first reference of this notion tells how Gregorian Armenians’ home became their (Sunni Kurds) home after Sîtu Agha attacked the Armenians. The requests of the leader of Armenians, Melik Xemo from Sîtu Agha were in vain: “Don’t fight with us, don’t exterminate us, don’t expel us from our territory. Zêrê is the central pole; it is the central pole of Oremar region. If central pole is burnt, the house will also burn.”⁴

Xelil continued:

The things that we did to the Armenians, the atrocities we inflicted on them cannot be told. There was a man called Xenî in Oramar. He put fourteen Armenian kids in a barrel. This happened in our region. He covered the barrel with mat. Then

⁴ “..serê me neken, me nekirken, me nekene derê ser mintiqame. Hinde kû Zêrê ye gotê bersifke, bersifka Oramar e. Heka bersifk sot de xani je ji sojit.”

mat was used instead of carpets. The hill of Deryê Esam has approximately the height of two to three kilometers. Those fourteen kids were thrown from that hill and all of them turned into pieces in that barrel. Armenians were so stranded that even ill women couldn't flee, elders couldn't run away. All of them were massacred. After these, the members of Oramari tribe plundered all valuable things and settled in these Armenian villages.

The time period to where Xelil located the start of his story, that is, the first decades of the twentieth century, was a time of rapid disintegration for the Ottoman Empire. Since the mid-19th century, Ottoman rulers had applied varied centralizing policies and unifying ideologies like Ottomanism and Pan-Islamism to construct a new political identity, prevent the loss of territories, keep Ottoman peripheries under control, prevent foreign intervention and/or maintain the loyalty and docility of their subjects, particularly the Muslim ones. Islam was used as a unifying political idiom by the Ottoman rulers for long centuries. However, in the last quarter of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, Islam became a particularly powerful unifying force in forming alliances with the recently rebellious Muslim ethnic groups such as the Kurds and/or in repositioning Muslim subjects as buffer groups against “rebellious” non-Muslim communities (Kayali, 1997). This Ottoman policy worked well especially with the Sunni Kurds, who stood alongside with their other “Muslim brothers” against “internal” (non-Muslim groups) and “external enemies” (particularly the British and Russian empires). Many Kurdish tribes were reorganized into the Hamidiye regiments or local paramilitary groups who were active in the destruction of non-Muslim communities (Bruinessen, 1992). As a passing reference, it should be also noted that Sultan Abdulhamid, the ideologue of Islamism, was then known

among the Kurds as “Bave Kurda” (the Father of Kurds).

Pan-Islamism was one of the last resorts of the Ottoman rulers who were in trouble with nationalist movements of non-Muslim communities. While Pan-Islamism somehow helped to keep together the Muslim subjects of the empire, at least until the First World War, it automatically turned the non-Muslim communities such as the Armenians, Greeks, Chaldeans, Assyrians and others into “outsiders” within the Ottoman territories, or “internal enemies”. Apart from being an attempt to “handle” non-Muslim nationalist claims over territory, the confiscation of non-Muslim subjects’ lands and property was a powerful motivation for the Muslims to expel their non-Muslim neighbors. Throughout my interviews with him, Xelil repeatedly emphasized that Turks and Kurds were “brothers”, they expelled the Christians from those lands and confiscated them together.

In Xelil’s narrative, the content and boundaries of Kurdish and Turkish identities were told through their joint opposition to non-Muslim populations, particularly Christians, as others. Hence Christians become the constitutive outside of Kurdish identity, also providing a common ground for Kurds and Turks to forge an alliance of “brothers”. It was through such an alliance, we are told, that the leader of Kurdish Oremar tribe attacked Christian villages, de-Christianized and made the region a home exclusively populated and dominated by Muslim Kurds. Hence, the story of massacring Armenians is the story of the settlement of the Oremari Tribe into the entire region of the southwest of Yüksekova. The destruction of Christian Armenian homes is simultaneously and fundamentally a story of Muslim Kurdish home-making.

And yet, this Muslim “brotherhood” of Kurds and Turks could last only for one decade. After having told the displacement of Christian populations from Oremar, Xelil continued with the stories of his father and grandfather after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, when Kurdish-Turkish relations started deteriorating radically.

It was 1922 or 1923. The Republic of Turkey was established. Turkish gendarme units came to Oramar for the first time. Sîtu took care of them. They were working for Sîtu, doing his errands. After a few years, some military officers were appointed to Oramar. Some time later, they abducted three married women. Alixan, the headman of the village, objected to these officers. As a response these officers sent eight soldiers. They killed Alixan in Gîzê Ispî and threw his body into the valley. The death of Alixan could not be understood for two, three days. Then villagers realized that he was neither in his house nor in his brother house. Villagers started looking for him. Alixan's body was found shattered with bullets and covered with stones in the valley. Villagers started thinking about they should do with all these happenings. They decided to revolt and prepared to raid on the gendarme station. Although the people of Oramar collectively decided on the revolt, later some families collaborated with the state. When the gendarme station was informed about the revolt, they attacked first. It last for one week. There were a lot of casualties from both sides. The government, with the help of other tribes in the region, suppressed the revolt. Most of the families in Oramar had to flee. Those who stayed were the ones who collaborated with the state. Oramaris fled to Iraq. The Oramaries who now live in Iraq are those who fled there after the revolt. My grandfather was one of them. He was very young, when he left. He fell down from a cliff and died in Iraq.

After the massacre of Armenians in Oremar, Kurds remained as the only ethnic group in the region. Yet, with the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the politics of alliance between the Kurds and the Ottomans left its place to a new mode of state governance in the region that created constant tension and conflicts with the local Kurds. The Ottomans had loosely defined the region as a frontier zone, exerted no direct control in the region and left the authority to the regional powers. The

Republican policy, however, was one of extreme centralization. The borders got strictly defined and rigidified. New gendarmerie stations were constructed and permanent gendarmerie units were transferred to the region. Although the first Turkish soldiers who came to Oremar were under the control of Sîtu Agha, the appointment of high-ranking military officers to the region changed the power balance, which culminated in the destruction of the authority of Kurdish tribes and the consolidation of the power and authorities of the emerging Turkish nation-state.

Modern nation state, Lefebvre argues, “promotes and imposes itself as the stable center – definitely- of (national) societies and spaces” (Lefebvre, 1991, 24). The nationalization and centralization of state power and territory in Oremar operated at multiple registers, a policy that was buttressed by aggressive cultural homogenization and assimilation practices. Nation-states often express their power through a series of monolithic rationalities, techniques and tactics imposed on heterogeneous peoples and spaces, which often times makes the constant transgression of these impositions inevitable. Oramar was located on the Turkish-Iraqi border, which gave the Oremari tribe abundant opportunities to challenge Turkish state policies and territorial authority in the region. In 1930, the Oremari tribe staged a massive revolt.

According to Xelil, there were two important reasons for this revolt. These were the abduction of the three married women after the appointment of high ranking Turkish military officers to Oremar and the murder of the village headman Alixan. Local fighters planned to raid the gendarmerie station. However, Turkish army forces acted first and suppressed the revolt brutally. All tribe members who has links with

the revolt fled to Iraq. In the suppression of the revolt, the state managed to secure local support from some other Kurdish tribes.

Xelil's grandfather also escaped to Iraq with his two sons and one daughter. Xelil himself was born in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1942. He returned to Turkey, when he was ten. This was a period of relative political liberalization promoted by the Democrat Party (DP). Led by Adnan Menderes, the DP came to power in the first genuine multi-party elections in 1950 and ended the twenty-seven-year single party rule of the Republican People Party, which was the founding party of the Republic. Xelil's father was trained as an imam. He worked in the mosques of Doski tribe villages after his return. In 1958, he and his cousins rebuilt and settled in an old destroyed Christian village. The name of the village was Mêdê (Demirli), a location very close to the border of Iraq.

After Adnan Menderes was hanged after the 1960 coup d'état, the state started disturbing us again. Gendarmerie were constantly raiding our houses and beating us. We were poor. We did not have enough to eat, so we could not give them the things they wanted. They insisted to get honey and eggs. Some had honey, but they didn't have eggs. Others had eggs, but they didn't have honey. They forced people to take from them both eggs and honey and until they got them they would beat them up. I saw these with these eyes. This continued from 1960 to 1988... We gained these lands together. We killed others together. Our enemy was the same, but now they talk about Çanakkale (Dardanelle). My father's grandfather was also martyred in Çanakkale. Still we do not know where his grave is. We Kurds were more courageous than Turks. Whenever there was a fight with infidels, we fought against them. Then we both were Muslims, we were brothers, but later they did not accept us as brothers. What should we do?

Raids on villages and houses in Oremar became frequent practices since 1960. Apart from harassment and plundering, the gendarmerie did not allow villagers to

cultivate rice and tobacco, which could be produced only by the permission of state authorities. If they were found, such items were also confiscated. Some officers even demanded sheep from the villagers. Others threatened villagers not to sue them for such demands. Such repressive practices have deeply marked local Kurdish imaginations of the Turkish state. In fact, in his narrative, whenever he talked about the state, Xelil used the terms Hukimet (Government), karakol (army station), esker (soldier), cenderme (gendarmerie) and artêş (army) interchangeably. At least according to Xelil's story, in Oremar state power is primarily and fundamentally military power expressed in manifold forms.

Xelil's life took a radical turn after 1985. Although he did not have a very good life and good relations with Turkish soldiers before this time, he could still manage to have a life with its own course and develop some strategies to keep up with his daily life (Certeau, 2002). However, in 1985 the state introduced into region what is called "village-guard system" in order to fight the PKK's guerilla warfare that had started just one year ago. Through this system the state sought to recruit local Kurds as paid or "voluntary" paramilitary forces. Although officially they were defined as temporary and voluntary village guards, for most local people recruitment was not a matter of choice. In 1988, Xelil and his villagers were forced by military officers to take arms and fight against the PKK. That was the only way to stay in the village:

At the time of Lieutenant Huseyin Kurt, Major Coskun and Lieutenant Colonel Erdal, in fact, even before them, in 1985 the village guard system was imposed. I did not accept it. What was the reason? My kids were very small, they were illiterate, they could not even recognize money. There was no road, no school in our village. It is still the same. I was the head of the family. Sometimes I carried 50 sacks of flour from Yüksekova to our village. For our winter consumption, we used to buy food supply

for six months, because during winter there was no access to city centers. Anyway, Lieutenant Huseyin Kurt, Major Coskun and Lieutenant Colonel Erdal were constantly forcing me to be a village guard. One day, Lieutenant Huseyin Kurt called me to the gendarmerie station. He told me that we had to leave our village. I said, "Sir! The only thing that I own in Turkey is this village. My father settled down in this village with the permission of the government in 1958. All of my kids were born in this village in last 30 years." I had two hundreds of sheep. Once I sold one thousand kilos of honey in Gever [Yüksekova], exactly one thousand kilos. He told me "No!" I did not listen and went to Hakkari to meet the governor. I was wondering whether the governor, Sahabettin Harput, knew anything about this. It was the second day of a religious holiday. My turban on top of my head, I went to see the governor. He treated me with tea and candies. He asked me "What is the matter? What bothers you that you came here?" I told him all the problems that I had with the army. He couldn't believe and took the phone. At that moment, a major appeared at the door. He did not come in and said "if they won't evacuate that village, we will bomb it!" He said this to the governor. We were sitting there in his office. One moment ago the governor was trying to help me, but when he heard the major, he hung up the phone. He told me that they were cruel and they would kill me if I did not leave my village. After I sold some of my assets, we moved to Zerê in 1989. Sheep and cattle were not worth a lot of money, but we could not take them with us. I sold them and we settled down in Zerê.

At the time when Xelil moved from Mêdê to Zerê, it was a small village composed of twenty three houses. Many of the villagers had already become village guards. After they moved to Zerê, Xelil refused to become a village guard for a while. But when their material resources were depleted, he and his sons joined the village guards. This, however, did not mean the end of state pressures, because they were constantly accused of not fighting against the PKK effectively. According to Xelil, the villagers often refrained from engaging with the guerrillas passing by, because they both outnumbered the villagers and had more powerful guns. Consequently, army officers started threatening the villagers, "If you don't kill the terrorists, then we will

kill you.” These threats proved to be ineffective. Soon, the villagers were forced to evacuate the village. Then the village and its vicinity were destroyed with mortar fire. The villagers ran away without taking their livestock, harvest and houses. The evacuation of the region was partly to punish the villagers for their reluctance in fighting the PKK. But it was also a broader policy to deplete the local support of the Kurdish guerilla, a policy that was then summarized in military terms as “If you want to catch the fish, you have to dry up the water”. After the village had been evacuated the houses burnt down, all the villagers migrated to Yüksekova.

Hence, in eighty years, both Mêdê and Zere were evacuated and destroyed two times, first as Armenian then as Kurdish villages. It was only at the end of his story that I could understand why rather than his childhood memories Xelil had started his life story with the massacre and displacement of the Armenians in 1914-15. It was the similarity in the ways in which violence and displacement have marked local histories and spaces of these peoples that structured his narrative, which powerfully articulated the Armenian past and the Kurdish present in one and the same story. Mêdê and Zere, which served as homes for Armenians and Kurds successively, were truly bleeding spaces inscribed with scarred stories and histories of both peoples under militarist state policies of Turkish nation-making. Combining Armenian and Kurdish histories of violence and displacement in his narrative, Xelil points to an apocalyptic time-space that shatters the linearity of time, collapsing the temporal boundaries between the past and the present. In this apocalyptic time-space, previous hostilities towards the Armenians leave their place to the seeds of a different ethics of self and community, and a different sense of history in which the oppressed past stubbornly

makes itself visible in and immediately relevant to the present.

After they had moved to Yüksekova, Xelil and his family had to endure great difficulties to maintain their lives. Employment opportunities in the town were scarce. His sons started to work as shepherds in nearby villages. But, other tragedies came soon. In 1994, one of his sons was taken under custody and then executed by Turkish soldiers. One other son died in a traffic accident. These two events irreversibly shattered Xelil's home and family. His other sons went to Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkish cities, Istanbul and Mersin, to escape state repression and with the hope of finding jobs. His three daughters married, after they had moved to Yüksekova. From 1994 onwards, in order to find the murderers of his son, Xelil became politicized and aligned himself with people trying to find their disappeared relatives. He became active in the Kurdish political movement and joined in the fight against the rampant injustices taking place in the region. Now, Xelil and his wife live alone in their dilapidated house in Yüksekova waiting for the day when they may finally return home to Oremar.

Chapter 2:

The Home: The Locus of Politics

I first met Xece and Feride in the winter of 2007. They were *jintıs* (sisters-in-law) in their mid-fifties. Both had lived in nearby villages of Yüksekova until they married at the age of fifteen. Then, they moved to the city center of Yüksekova with their husbands. When I met them, they were living in adjacent houses in a neighborhood close to city center. I conducted my first interview in Xece's house, which was still under construction, though it was first built in 1990. Its dark purplish-red iron entry door had a sharp contrast with the unpainted exterior walls that were gray, just like the half rusty metal sheet that covered its roof. The iron door was covered with a thick blanket from inside to keep out the winter cold. There was a coal stove in the living room with doors opening to every other room. I had most of my conversations and interviews with them around that stove, and, of course, with hot smuggled tea.

Tracing life stories of these sisters-in-law, this chapter reflects on their engagements with political violence and state terror since the military coup of 1980 with a focus on their changing relationship with their families and homes. I will particularly center on the raids on their houses by Turkish security/military forces and explore the changing semantics of home as state terror extends its reach to the capillaries of everyday life. Accordingly, I will discuss the home as a locus of politics, as a space where the distinctions between the public/political and the private blur, a key site where state terror takes place and form. At least in the last three decades, far from being safe and private, most homes in Yüksekova have become highly unsafe and

political due to constant house raids as state surveillance on the private expanded towards controlling/containing the political situation. Contrary to narratives of displacement, in this case the state does not force people to leave their homes, but turns those homes into terrorizingly scary spaces of surveillance. Constant police raids on houses creates a sense of insecurity for people and staying in your own home, in time, turns into a perturbed, unpleasant and even scary experience.

Now I turn to the stories of Xece and Feride. Neither of them talked much about the first fifteen years of their lives, other than some description of their villages and families. Both started their stories with their marriage and their new lives in the city center of Yüksekova. Their husbands were working as public officers, and, according to local standards, they were not having poor lives. But their first experiences in the town were very different from their village lives, not simply in that they had difficulties in adapting to their new social environment, but in that their marriage and their moving to Yüksekova coincided with a new political moment in the country in general, and in the region in particular. Their new families were politically engaged; their husbands had sympathy for the ascending Kurdish nationalist movement, which was inspired by Kurdish organizations in the Kurdistan region of Iraq in the 1970s.

As women deeply politicized in the last three decades, it was not surprising that both Xece and Feride kept very brief their “pre-political” village life and elaborated on their memories of the military coup of September 12, 1980, a breaking point in the lives of both, a building block of the political memory of the region and the Kurdish movement in general. Indeed, almost all of my informants who had

witnessed the coup narrated it as a most crucial turning point in their lives. Xece recalled those days as follows:

Previously, there was not this kind of Kurdishness [PKK], Celal [Talabani] and Mesut [Barzani] were powerful at that time. But even then, we were in this struggle. We struggled until September 12. After the coup, all of the men in our family had to be deserters for two months. Hamit was caught soon but Selim remained a deserter. The coup was very harsh. Those days were so bad that I can still remember it vividly. That morning when I woke up, I saw that all around of Gever [Yüksekova] was surrounded. I can say that almost in every single corner of the city there were 10 soldiers. Even now when I remember, my whole body gets goose bumps. All these hills were full of soldiers. I went and woke Selim up. I told him that everywhere was surrounded. He said “Aha, it's done!” I asked “What's done?” He replied, “The army took action!” I couldn't understand. We were not like today. We, women, did not know anything about these things. I asked him again, “What is going on?” He did not say anything and then left the room. Then I understood what he meant with his silence. And, I thought, yes that was what September 12 meant. Those days were very bleak.

For Feride, too, the coup of 1980 was a devastating experience, a foundational story that has shaped most of her life since then. Like Xece's, her pre-coup memories were brief, while those of the coup were elaborate and vivid.

I had been living in a village roughly for fifteen years. My father's house was there. When I was fifteen, I moved to Gever. My husband was working in the state post office. We lived six, seven years together. Then the coup of 1980 happened. After the coup, he got caught. He was a very hard-working officer. His friends and supervisors loved him. He was a versatile person. Those who did not love him, those who knew that he was a productive and influential person, had fixed their eyes on him for a long time. By any means, they could not vanquish him. The coup was a good opportunity for those people. They got him arrested. He remained disappeared for sixty days. We did not know where he was. Eventually we learned he was in Diyarbakir military prison... He was released in the spring. Of course, he was fired from his job. For five years, we lived in misery. Five years later, he was given his job back, but then we were exiled to

Erzincan.

Life in Erzincan, a city whose political culture was dominated by Turkish nationalists, was not easy for them as Kurds from Hakkari who were exiled due to their involvement in Kurdish politics. In Erzincan they were typically viewed as traitors who were disloyal to the country. They experienced many hostilities both in the work place and in the neighborhood they lived. The “suspicion” of their neighbors, her husband’s office friends and supervisors never went away. Eventually her husband had to quit his job and they returned to Yüksekova in 1988. But in Yüksekova, too, life was difficult, because Feride’s husband could not find a job for quite some time. Later he started to sell construction materials such as iron plates, steel bars and cement. After a few years of hard work, their economic life somehow improved. It took them ten years to have a new start and the future had some hopes and promises. But that was only until 1992.

1992 is an important date for many local Kurds in the Kurdish region. That year the Kurdish movement decided to celebrate Newroz publicly for the first time after the coup of 1980. Newroz, meaning New Day, has traditionally been a spring holiday annually celebrated on March 21st by Persians, Kurds and some Turkic groups. Because it was banned by the state, Kurdish celebrations of Newroz remained illegal activities throughout the 1990s. When in 1992 the Kurds insisted on public celebrations, Turkish police and military forces intervened, burning whole towns like Sirnak, killing hundreds, ninety-three only in Sirnak, and arresting thousands. Almost all of the dead and the arrested were civilians. The state’s response was harsh particularly because the increasingly hegemonic Kurdish movement was in the

process of consolidating Newroz as a mythical story of resistance, symbolizing the day of the re-birth and liberation of the Kurds. Accordingly, those who participated in celebrations were viewed by the state as “terrorists” or sympathizers of the “terrorists”, that is, the Kurdish movement. In Yüksekova, it was the People’s Labor Party (HEP) who organized the celebrations. HEP was the first legal Kurdish party established in 1991, who also established a branch office in Yüksekova the same year. Like other places, the intervention of police and military forces was harsh. The celebrations turned into a massive uprising; serhildan, or Kurdish intifada. Many were killed or arrested.

Although no unfortunate thing happened to Feride, Xece and their husbands during the events, the husbands were later arrested in violent house raids due to their participation in the celebrations. Then they were sent to Diyarbakır military prison. Feride’s husband stayed in prison for two months, while Xece’s for three months. After they had been released, though, soldiers led by the battalion commander of Yüksekova routinely raided their houses. They also received many death threats. The atmosphere of danger and insecurity became so intense that Xece’s husband joined the ranks of PKK, leaving behind his family. Hence, 1992 was another turning point for Xece and Feride. Xece’s husband joined PKK and left her alone with their children and Feride’s husband was frequently deserted, they would see the violent face of the state in even more severe and systematic forms. Between 1992 and 1999, almost every week, sometimes a couple of times in a day, their houses were raided and searched by the police or soldiers with diverse excuses and allegations. The houses were literally put under siege. Xece and Feride were accused of not sharing with the

police information on the place of their husbands and, later, of their children, who would soon join PKK ranks in the mountains.

After their fathers had left, the children were also taken into polis custody on a regular basis. Some of them were harassed and humiliated even at the school. And when detained, the children were also interrogated for the whereabouts of their fathers. When Xece's husband joined the PKK, her oldest son was a high school student. According to Xece and Feride, the police constantly terrorized the children by threatening to kill them if they did not cooperate. In 1993, police harassments became most frequent. Xece's oldest son could not take it anymore and joined his father in the mountains. Her oldest daughter followed him one year later.

Constant house raids and pressures on the children were not the only problems. In addition to the constant violation of their private spaces and further destruction of families, their social ties with neighbors and relatives were also transformed (Feldman, 1991). The permanent surveillance of their houses created a sense of insecurity not only for them but also for their relatives, neighbors and others who wanted to visit them. Those who dared to visit them were routinely stopped and interrogated after they left the house.

Amidst these violent changes and transformations and the growing violent state presence in their daily and familial lives, Feride and Xece became further politically engaged. They started more regularly visiting the Kurdish political party office and other associations and organizations, meeting other women who had similar experiences of state terror or whose family members joined the PKK. This was a period when Kurdish women's activism was rapidly growing, transforming personal

suffering and victimhood into political struggle and subjectivity. While trying hard to take care of their remaining children, both Feride and Xece were on the streets whenever there were protests or demonstrations. One effect of the war was the dislocation of highly conservative traditional family structures and social status and roles of the women, motivating them to get involved in public and political life in unprecedented forms.

Particularly after the husbands and children left for the mountains, the home was no longer a private and secure place for Feride and Xece, while the boundaries between its inside and outside were radically blurred and routinely transgressed. They had literally no control over their private lives and spaces. This was a central and repeated theme throughout my interviews. Xece described those days as follow:

Sometimes, our house and the house of my brother-in-law were raided seven times a day, sometimes eight times a day, sometimes in the middle of the night. While they were searching the house, they would take us out, and we had to stay in the street full of mud or snow. When they did not kick us out, they gathered everybody in the house in a room and two soldiers would stand over us. We had to hold still until they searched the entire house. Almost every single day they were in both our and my brother-in-law's house. Every single day of God they harassed us and our kids.

Hence, state terror disseminated not only through frequent armed conflicts, arrests, torture or disappearing people but also through such constant house raids. Through such techniques, the state acquired in popular imagination the quality of an omnipresent apparatus in constant search of “terrorists” or “enemies”, producing and reproducing itself as a phantasmatic fictional reality (Aretxaga, 1999) seeking to

dominate everyday life and disseminating uncertainty, insecurity and fear .⁵

These frequent raids became a daily routine, often with the pretext that the police received some other information. Putting aside the question of whether the police really had any information, such a pretext had two effects. Under emergency state rule, the police was already granted the permission to search any place in any time. In other words, the police did not need to show any reason for house raids or searches. Without legal permission, they could do whatever they wanted without any accountability. In such a context, the discourse of information was used to gain some legitimacy and justification for the raids. Second, it helped to promote discord and distrust among people, creating a climate of fear and suspicion. Since the source of information was never declared, the ensuing uncertainty created a situation in which anything was possible; particularly that friends and neighbors could be informers. In this sense, the discourse of information also helped to destroy social ties and solidarity within the community, while the consequent “blurring of fiction and reality” created a mass paranoia “that can be seen as a new technique of social control in which everyone suspects and fears every other; a collective hostile gaze, a human Panopticon” (Foucault, 1995; Scheper-Hughes, 1993, 226). Uncertainty under state of emergency rule worked as a very powerful mechanism of social control; a state in which every possibility became a fact (Taussig, 1989).

Xece talked at length about how they could not even stay at home between 1992 and 1999.

⁵ For further discussion on fantasy of statehood and how the state and its enemies are created and recreated as powerful fictional realities see Begoña Aretxaga, “Maddening States,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35 (2003).

At least for six years, we could not sleep at our separate houses. We, two families, stayed in one house at night. We all slept in one room. Like shepherds, we were constantly checking outside; we could not sleep until we were sure that nobody was around. This was our routine, this was our struggle, like shepherds we tried to protect our kids. I can never tell everything that we suffered. The cruelty we experienced cannot be told, written, or forgotten.

Feride continued:

For seven years, we did not even change our clothes before we went to bed. For seven years we slept like shepherds who sleep with kepenek (thick shepherd clothing). We used to cover ourselves with a blanket or quilt and stood over our kids. We feared that something would happen to them. We constantly checked the bodies of our kids to be sure that they were not shot or we checked to make sure that nobody was around to throw a bomb inside the house. Because of the fear during armed conflicts, we took our kids to different houses. Some used to come and told us, "Today they will shell specific houses." Whose houses? Of course, the houses of families like us... I can tell you that almost every night bullets hit our houses, five hundred bullets into two houses. They even used rockets... Three times a year we replaced metal plates on our roofs. When we stayed at home, we heard the sound of bullets hitting the roof, tip tip tip. When the bullets hit the walls, we could understand from their sound, civ civ civ. Often times we took our kids to our relatives; we feared to sleep at home. They were constantly shelling us. Police panzers were always around our houses. We were under custody for seven years, exactly for seven years.

In order for the state to maintain and reproduce its domination in Yüksekova, this climate of fear and uncertainty and deteriorating social ties and solidarity networks were perhaps more effective than the physical powers of the state in the form of colossal military buildings, well-guarded military basements, police quarters, torture centers, checkpoints or panzers positioned at almost every street of the city. It was through such constant terrorizing of the home that the state extended its violent reach and surveillance to the so-called private sphere; becoming an entity so

“intimate” that it was now an essential and inseparable part of the home. That is, due to the frequency of the raids, the home and the state, the private and the public, or the daily and political life almost became one and the same thing. The home was no longer “home”, and beyond the public/private dichotomy, it became a key site in which the state inscribed itself into “individual bodies and the collective imagination through a constant sense of threat” (Green, 1999, 55); producing and reproducing itself as a spectral reality (Aretxaga, 2003) through its variegated governmental “effects” (Mitchell, 2008).

Chapter 3:

The Intimate Prisons

This chapter analyzes the home stories and experiences of people in Yüksekova, focusing on the rhythm, patterns, breaks and gaps of everyday life in the 1990s, when the war between the Turkish Army and the PKK guerrillas reached its peak. The armed conflict and political tension affected and transformed the region geographically, politically, economically and psychologically, leading to the emergence of new daily routines in the city. War became a part of daily life, enforced by the counter-insurgency techniques implemented throughout the region during this period. As a result, I propose that focusing on the rhythm of daily life—situating home at the center—is fundamental to understanding the larger social, political, economic and other processes escalated by the war that influenced the entire region. I argue that this new daily routine, imposed by the war, transformed people’s intimate space—their homes—into what I term intimate prisons.

The goal of counter-insurgency strategy was not solely to fight Kurdish guerrillas, but also to create a sense of insecurity and distrust in the Kurdish cities, thereby curtailing any oppositional actions. The constant dusk till dawn curfew, and random bomb blasts and shelling of neighborhoods confined people to their houses. People’s most intimate and secure places were turned into private spaces of confinement. Here it is important to note that in addition to viewing the armed conflict between PKK guerrillas and the Turkish Army as a clash between two armed groups, it also is necessary to examine how the conflict itself served as a means for the Turkish state to govern the Kurds as a population. Although in the official Turkish

state discourse the conflict was presented as a war against terrorist activities of “a handful of bandits,” all the measures and military strategies implemented by the Turkish state aimed to handle the situation on the scale of population.

The deaths, disappearances, house raids, curfews and torture created a generalized state of fear, through which the state aimed to monopolize violence (Siegel, 1998). These techniques intended to make people suspicious of each other, to dissolve the trusts of neighbors and friends, and in doing so, fiercely disrupt community life. Confining people to their homes was a way of silencing people on the scale of an entire population, isolating people from each other, disrupting social ties, and inscribing the power and violence of the state to the capillaries of everyday life and the memories of people by disseminating fear into society. As Michael Taussig notes “the point about silencing and the fear behind silencing is not to erase the memory. Far from it. The point is to drive the memory deep within the fastness of the individual so as to create more fear and uncertainty in which dream and reality commingle” (1989, 27). Mass forced migration and arrests, homogenously identifying Kurds as potential terrorists, constant curfews, and house to house searches were some of the common practices that confined people not only to specific places such as prisons, camps and houses, but also in specific affective states which aimed to dominate society by fear and anxiety.

The narratives I collected are overwhelmed with reference to these experiences. By concentrating on these accounts, I will attempt to provide a general description of the daily routine of the residents of Yüsekova and the psychological and political effects of these enforcements on people’s lives, particularly in relation to

their sense of home. These accounts will provide insight into the way in which the state implements its power and governs the population in a war-torn region. The dwellers of the city were marked as potential threats to the state and they were treated accordingly. In order to control the movements and activities of people, they were to be confined systematically. With the State of Emergency the city was governed by new rules through which the state was able to intervene in the daily routine of the people effectively. The region was declared an exception zone where the general law of the Turkish State would no longer be applicable (Schmitt, 2006). Then, the region was ruled by decrees, not the law. Rule by decree made it possible for the security apparatuses of the Turkish State to exercise its power in full extent. As Giorgio Agamben discusses in depth, when states of emergency are in place, rule by decree is very common. In his critical dialog with Carl Schmitt and Walter Benjamin, Agamben describes the sovereign as the one who has the power to decide the norm and the right to suspend it. For him, this suspension is an exclusion of some domains, lives and politics from law itself; relegating them to the state of exception is the only way of inclusion of the excluded spaces and bodies into the sovereign's orbit of power (Agamben, 2005).

The rules and regulations implemented in this state of exception created a constant state of fear in the city. The aim was to put fear in the hearts of people, thereby creating obedient bodies. The scary and long nights made people's homes ineluctable prisons for them. Disrupting people's control of their houses and sense of security was the target of state power. In this case the state does not banish people from their houses, burn their houses or invade their houses physically, but instead it

tries to control and punish people by incarcerating them to their most intimate places, to their houses. People's homes were used as a mechanism of controlling and restricting people's movements and interactions. Thus, the state attempted to turn the home, as both a physical structure and a sense, into an apparatus of control and domination.

The Cherry Tree: Confinement and Socialities

When I went to Yüksekova to conduct fieldwork in 2007, I started with a long interview with one of my childhood friends, Umut. A twenty-six year old university graduate, Umut worked as a provisional teacher in a small village near Yüksekova. Although he was a child during the peak of the war, his narrative provides striking details about the effects of war on daily life. In addition to Umut's narrative, other life stories also provide rich details about the difficult challenges people faced. Yet most of these narratives reached their climax especially when their narrators described their most personal stories that generally took place either in their house or around it.

One year after Umut was born, in 1981, his father had planted a cherry tree for him, - in front of their porch. Their house was on top of a small hill next to the main road. They had a complete view of the city from their garden. With spring the cherry tree had started to blossom before all of the other trees in the neighborhood – it was a harbinger of spring. There were varieties of trees in their garden, including poplars, acacias, apricots and pears. For Umut, playing in the shade of these trees and eating their fruits were activities that constituted much of his memories of childhood. When he turned ten, he remembers that all the children in the neighborhood were forbidden from playing their favorite game *titanê*, typically played at dusk. Similar to the

popular American game of 'hide and seek,' tîtanê involves one person sitting on a can and counting up to fifty while all the other children hide themselves from view. After counting up to fifty she or he has to find everybody and call their names as they are found. The novelty of tîtanê is that those hiding can exchange their clothes with each other in order to confuse the catcher, a twist that is made more fun when it gets dark. If any hider can surreptitiously approach the can and strike it, the catcher has to restart the count and the game begins again. In those years tîtanê signified for children an exciting end of the day.

In 1992, eleven years after the cherry tree was planted in front of their house, the first celebration of Newroz (New Day) after the 1980 coup d'état was held in Yüksekova. The Turkish security forces intervened during the celebration of Newroz. During the violent clash between police and demonstrators, some protesters who were searching for a means to strike back, broke down the cherry tree and threw its branches on the armored vehicles. Thus after March 21st, 1992, the breaking of the cherry tree not only signified the end of the children's favorite game, but also the end of 'normal' life in Yüksekova. Yüksekova turned into a ghost city. The sweet smell of the cherry tree gave way to the pungent smell of gunpowder.

From 1992 to 1998, there were armed clashes in the city almost every night, except winters. The sounds of guns being loaded, the pungent smell of powder and sleeplessness soon became part of daily life in the city. Those nights were perhaps some of the longest nights Yüksekova's people ever experienced. In fact, those nights had their own rhythm. Everybody in the market, children who were playing in the streets, people who were visiting their neighbors and relatives had to return home by

five in the evening to meet the curfew. Even before darkness covered Yüksekova, members of families congregated at their homes and the silence of the night began to suffocate the city. After 5 pm life in the city was suspended and a new day started only at 7 in the morning, albeit only if there were not too many casualties that night. In effect people were forced to stay in their houses more than half the day. Being outside the home after five in the evening could be dangerous or fatal. The best possible outcome under those circumstances was a detention, while being targeted by the bullets of “security forces” was a worse fate that many unlucky residents of this city experienced.

The daily schedule of the city was very simple. On the rare occasion that there was no curfew during the day you could go to the market, school or play with your friends in the street, put your animal out to pasture or attend to other daily routines, but before it got dark you had to be in your home again. Windows were covered with thick blankets, blocking sight of the police’s constant neighborhood searches, carried out with the powerful lights of heavy weapons on Armored Personal Carriers that are commonly known as panzers.

Armed conflicts have their own rhythm as well. By nine or ten at night, people nervously anticipated the routine clashes through loud sounds of gunfire, explosions and the ever-present dangers those sounds represented. Somebody from the family sat close to the light-switch and when clashes started he or she switched off the lights. People slowly moved to relatively well-protected rooms where beds were already laid out. Generally, the rooms at the back of the houses which did not overlook roads or military bases were the safest spaces. Since the sounds of guns were very loud, it was

generally not possible to talk, but people who stayed close could whisper in each other's ears. Elders prayed in Kurdish or Arabic, adults tried to calm and console children but at the same time all attempted to prepare themselves for the terrifying moment of explosions. Constant explosions of bombs, illuminating shells and green, yellow and red lines of bullets in the sky were luridly lighting the city and these rooms. The conflict turned all these practices into daily routine and shaped the lives of all those who struggled to survive against the odds.

Daily conversations were also shaped by these rhythms: people speculated about which room was the best place to dig a bomb shelter, from which part of the neighborhood guns were fired, which family should stay with whom, how weapons should be hid, and what was going on in other neighborhoods.

After a few years, Umut's father surprised him with the news that the destroyed cherry tree had started sprouting new shoots from its surviving roots. With great care, he nurtured the healing tree back to life. Similar to the cherry tree, everyday life of Yüsekova was disrupted by this war, but survived. Residents of Yüsekova created new socialities and relationships in the midst of the destructive elements of war. Although many forms of previous socialities were affected drastically, people started to create new social relations and solidarities out of these practices. Since people's lives were at stake, solidarities were transformed with the urgency of finding ways to protect and help each other. Houses close to police offices or military bases, and those near major roads, for example, were frequently targeted by police and soldiers, and bore signs of assaults such as multiple bullet holes, and damaged walls and windows. Staying in these places was not safe. People began

sharing houses with those whose houses were not well-sheltered.

All-day curfews were declared in addition to regular dusk till dawn curfew, after severe armed conflicts, during citywide house searches, and after mass demonstrations. These all-day lasted for days at a time. Roads were controlled by special security forces and police panzers constantly patrolled neighborhoods. During all-day curfews pharmacies and bakeries were the only shops open in the bazaar. In anticipation of the curfews, people generally tried store basic foods in their homes. Of course, this was only an option more for those people who had the economic power to do so. It was more common after the first day of curfew for people to run out of bread stock. In order to buy bread, somebody from the family had to go to the bazaar. Because of the risk, adults would not venture to go to bazaar; they knew that if they encountered police they would be treated as an outlaw. As a result, generally small boys were sent to bazaar, even though it was mostly impossible to go to city center even for children. Although theoretically pharmacies and bakeries were open, it was practically impossible to reach the city center where all these shops were located. When people could not buy bread from bakeries, families who baked their own bread with a tandoor (traditional oven) provided bread for those who could not do so on their own. Sharing bread with those who needed it entailed its own risks. But people brought bread from different neighborhoods surreptitiously and showed their solidarity with others.

The counter-insurgency methods (curfews, arbitrary arrests, house raids, torture, disappearance, etc.) used by state forces to isolate people from the community, terrorized the population into confinement in their homes (Feldman,

1991). State violence therefore aimed to transform the most intimate and secure places of ordinary people, their own homes into private cells. However, despite the harsh conditions resulting from these efforts, people created different social relations and strengthened bonds and solidarities inside their homes. Multiple families began spending their nights together in one house. Sometimes more than twenty people sheltered in one single room for days. They ate and drank together, they feared and enjoyed together, they prayed and cried together, from these intimate prisons they embraced their social ties and re-generated them together.

Things and the Sense of Home

In this confinement, people's relations with things were also reshaped accordingly. I propose that the rhythm of everyday life can also be traced through looking at the place and circulation of objects in houses. The things that we have tell a lot about us, just as our own beings tell a lot about the things that we have. Listening to the interviews again and again, inescapably two things struck my attention, cassette tapes and books. I do not know whether I should refer to them as things, commodities or ghosts, but it was very clear that they were not just things in these narratives. What does it mean and how does it feel to have a cassette or book in your home which was considered "dangerous," and how does contemplating this or tracing the journey of these items in the house help us to understand the subtle flow of people's lives in Northern Kurdistan?

Observing and contemplating the sense and (possible) consequences of having a Kurdish cassette or book in your house in Yüksekova during the 1990s provides us with detailed information on the place of objects in social imaginary and people's

recurring practices during war time. The stories of faded black plastic bags full of cassette tapes and worn out books constantly popped up in the interviews and in my own memories. These cassettes and books were narrated and remembered always with their ghostlike existence in the houses. Sometimes they were scattered all around the room and sometimes they were invisible but almost all the time they were around the home. They came up and then disappeared. They were a source of enjoyment and at the same time a source of panic and anxiety. They offered their comfort and discomfort simultaneously. Maybe this schizophrenic existence of these things was the source of their indispensability in Yüksekova. These two objects were at the center of almost all of my interviews.

These objects are of course the products of specific social and political relations in society. However, is it also possible to conceive of these objects over and above the limits and possibilities posed by the political and social conditions of their production, circulation and consumption? One way of thinking productively in this direction would be to closely examine the ways in which the circulation and consumption of these objects adhere to and transform particular sites like home, social relations and thereby socialities in their variegated specificities.

Until 2000, since Kurdish was practically banned in public sphere, Kurdish music cassettes were circulated clandestinely and most of them were amateur copies. In fact this legal restriction was not only against Kurdish cassettes but also for Turkish cassettes that were somehow seen to be oppositional. The cassette tapes that were produced and sold in the west of Turkey were illegal in Northern Kurdistan, so called eastern Turkey. You could even buy some of them in the music stores with legal tags;

but you should not get caught with them. Consequently in living rooms, Turkish cassettes embellished the shelves while others, as I noted earlier, were ghost-like. They could lurk just behind the cabinet, a dark corner of the storage or be buried in the backyard.

There was a very similar story about books, too. Compared to cassettes, books were not so prevalent, because of low literacy rates in Turkish or Kurdish for that matter. In fact there were very small numbers of people who could read and write in Kurdish, and given that Kurdish was forbidden there were almost no channels to achieve literacy in Kurdish. Most of these worn out books were in Turkish and were covered with newspapers. Some of them were on Kurdish history, Kurdish dictionary, genealogies of leftist movements in the world, poems, Marxist literature and so on. Although people covered these books with newspaper to make them less recognizable, the newspaper cover itself was a sign of the “insecureness” of these books. The books covered with newspapers were circulated through networks of friends. Sometimes you looked for a book for months, and when you got it, you tried to finish it and get rid of it as soon as possible. Like cassettes, these books came up and disappeared in different times.

The existence of these things was always a source of tension between family members. While everybody enjoyed these cassettes in the home, generally it was younger people who insisted on keeping these things, while elders tried to get rid of them. Given that house raids and curfews were part of daily life, to keep these things were very dangerous. Although there were no legal grounds for illegality of most of these cassettes and books, they could easily be used as an excuse for detention which

would generally mean very bad treatment and torture. When people thought that it was safe they dug them out; when they felt insecurity they hid them. This is why plastic bags were always waned and covers of books were worn out.

It cannot be argued that everybody was listening to these cassettes and reading these books with similar motivations. For some people the cassettes and books might signify a way of resistance to hegemonic power of the state or means of creating a better future (Scott, 1987). However for others these objects could mean very mundane entertainments or affection that might not directly have anything to do with political projects. Kurdish cassettes were, for some, purely a source of entertainment or enjoyment. Although some people do not attribute any political meaning to these objects, these objects have their own life which can have different effect on these people in this volatile environment. Nevertheless, despite the fact that these objects are circulated, consumed in ways that transcend the limits and possibilities presented by social and political conditions of their production, the sites, social relations and socialities that they produce remain tentative and fragile. The tentativeness and fragility of these objects can be understood in the context of their influence on these people's lives. For example, although you do not listen to certain cassettes for political aims but for enjoyment, the consequences associated with being arrested for possession of these objects will put you in a situation where you will be treated as enemy of the state. These kinds of processes can also be read as politicization of the masses in Yüksekova. The ghostlike objects which simultaneously bring happiness and pain, enjoyment and panic create their own tense aura for the population mostly in and around homes.

On another level, these cassettes were not ghostlike only for Kurds, but they were also ghostlike for the Turkish police and soldiers, because the Turkish state officially argued that there was no distinct language called Kurdish; for them, Kurds are mountain Turks. However when they came across a cassette in which speech or art was performed in Kurdish, or a book written in the Kurdish language, which they did not understand, they were haunted by that ever-present ghost. Being haunted by encountering these objects are not only an outcome of the state's effort to substantiate its hegemony but at the same time, treating everybody as usual suspects ends up turning these people into politically motivated hated others which eventually contributes to the ascending Kurdish political movement.

The point at which I am trying to arrive is that the daily routine and practices woven around home in Yüksekova that cannot be seen easily from outside can give us important clues to understanding both the changes and centrality of sense of home and the increased political tension in the region. Incarceration of people in their own homes is the effort of using peoples own homes, their most "secure" and intimate places against them. As we discussed in detailed previous chapters, here again we see that home itself became the locus of politics. In this case, home turns into a tool used to control and restrict people. This intervention to home brought with it all the changes in the daily routine, practices, and relations of people in Yüksekova. By talking about people's relations with books and cassettes, children's relations with games, people's stories of trees in their garden, neighbors relations with each other and framing all of these interactions as sociality woven around home, I provide vignettes from daily life of Yüksekova that became my entrance into the capillaries of

people's life that is anthropologically the crux of issue, for me, to understanding the ordinary, the sense of locality and the sense of home, power and resistance, creation and shaping of social imaginary in Kurdistan.

Conclusion

The ways of talking about home in Yüksekova animate this paper in which I have argued that the intimate place called home is a socio-political construction and can only be understood by historicizing it. People's endeavor to create and maintain their sense of home was analyzed through a series of narratives collected in Yüksekova in 2007. I specified three ways of talking about home to present my ethnographic data. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this study suggests that the modern definition of the concept of home as a private space and domain of non-politics is not only insufficient but also misleading in explaining the way people experience home in Yüksekova.

My conceptualization of home as a space is informed by a body of literature on space that defines space meaningfully only in and through social relations. I aimed to take an ethnographic look at home as a space that is situated in human agency and practices and which is open to change as it is shaped and reshaped as part of the dynamism of social, political and daily life. Moreover, I have argued that home is both the medium of political action and the product of social and political relations. In other words, home as a space is a constitutive element of social and political life in Yüksekova that both constrains and enables social action. Rather than being uniform and static, home as a social space provides dynamic and often contradictory settings for the creation of meaning and life in a war torn city.

Providing ethnographic vignettes of survival and home-making practices, I traced the changing semantics of home and the social/spatial relationships and cultural imaginaries associated with home in a Kurdish border town. I based my discussion on

two analytical questions to trace the changing semantics of home and to situate home in the larger socio-political context of the region. The first analytical question of this paper was how have the home and its local imaginaries in Yüksekova been transformed through the histories of violence over the last century? Through this question I tried to contextualize the stories of home by situating them historically. By analyzing the narratives gathered in Yüksekova, I argued that the feeling of being at home is meaningful only in relation to social and political power relationships. My discussion indirectly argues that the experience of home for Kurds can only be fully understood if the historical experiences of Armenian and other non-Muslim peoples of Hakkari are taken into consideration. This is the case not only because Kurds and non-Muslim populations went through similar processes in different times, but also because Kurds explain and articulate their sense of locality and experience of home with constant reference to their already changed socialities, of which non-Muslim subjects of the region have played a large role.

The second analytical question this paper addressed was how have violence and other power relationships permeated everyday life and the “intimate” space of home, shaping subjectivities and socialities? This analytical question provided the proper ground for my analysis to be receptive to the everyday experiences of people and ordinary occurrences in the city. It led me to question what kind of new everyday life practices emerged, how people experienced these practices and how they narrated their stories in this conjunction. Through these questions, I focused first on the ways in which violence influenced people’s experience with their “intimate” spaces -their homes. I pondered on the influence and the aim of the house raids, general house to

house searches and curfews on the sense of people belonging to a *home*. In addition to this, by focusing on the feeling of insecurity and anxiety of being at home – especially in the second chapter – I endeavored to understand how their relation with their “intimate” spaces has changed. In the third chapter, I tried to show how incarceration of people in their own homes changed their relations with their homes, their daily routines and subsequently their subjectivities.

These questions helped me to demonstrate what kind of different subjectivities and socialities were produced during the war when people’s relation with home and their sense of home had changed in Yüksekova. In the first chapter, I showed that after being displaced from his village as an ordinary villager, how Xelil has turned into a politically active member of Kurdish movement in the city alongside of those who were displaced forcefully and those who were trying to find their disappeared relatives. Xelil’s story is centered on the concept of home. Tracing this concept let me to see how his subject position had changed over time. Similarly, in the second chapter I discussed how the socio-political positions of women in the region had changed. Explaining this point became possible by demonstrating the parallelism between Feride and Xece’s changing relation with their homes and their changing political engagements over time. I demonstrated how amidst the violent changes and transformations, which included the growing violent state presence in their daily and familial lives, Feride and Xece became further politically engaged. Moreover, focusing on home enabled this paper to succinctly explain one of the important effects of the war which was the dislocation of highly conservative traditional family structures and social status and roles of the women, motivating them to get involved

in public and political life in unprecedented forms. I tried also to demonstrate not only home-making became a particularly difficult task during the war but also the relations between home and outside as well as between people and their spatial environment have been radically reconfigured and have pushed people to generate alternative social relation and solidarities accordingly.

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