Struggle in Exile: Kurdish Women’s Political Mobilization Across Borders
Nisa Göksel
Northwestern University

This paper discusses the processes of Kurdish women’s politicization from a transnational perspective, based on in-depth interviews that I conducted in Germany and France. The Kurdish Movement has established and defined itself in a transnational context of political mobility and imagination, as well as through its diasporic geography. The political subjectivities of Kurds have taken shape within this transnational setting. Kurdish women’s political mobilization, therefore, has a fundamentally transnational character insofar as it draws women together across generations and place.

As Kurdish women’s political activities move beyond territorial borders, Kurdish women’s movement creates its own geography; yet, its borders cannot simply be drawn through transnational ties established across different nation-states. This transnationalism takes the Middle East, Kurdistan in particular, as its center as it brings the places where Kurds live (such as European countries) into this specific political imagination.

Historically speaking, two moments mark major changes in political relations between Turkey, Europe, and Kurdistan. First, the 1990s saw significant migration flows as a result of war, human rights violations, violence, and forced migrations in the Kurdish region. Second, the 2000s have become a turning point in the sense that the Kurdish Movement’s political prospects have begun to transform and as Kurdish women have engaged in various scales of politics—from local settings to transnational platforms.

In light of these historical and recent changes, I examine the political subjectivities of Kurdish women through their narratives of politics, migration, and exile. I give an account of the possibilities and impossibilities that Europe provides to Kurdish women in terms of their engagement in politics. I then argue that the lives of Kurdish women in Europe become one not only of the everyday struggle of being migrants and refugees, but also one of surviving as political subjects.