

**BEHAVIOUR of WOMEN in the MIDDLE EAST within the FRAMEWORK OF
GENDER IDENTITY and KURDISH MUSICAL EXCLAMATION:
“ZILGIT” or “TİLİLİ”**

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Abstract

This study is constituted to handle the *zılgıt* that Kurdish use in or out their music with the framework of gender behaviour and Kurdish identity. *Zılgıt* or in Kurdish mean *tilili* is the name of the sound telling middle East women's emotions including deep sorrow and hilarity, generally in music but sometimes without music by dancing their tongue in their mouth in a quick way.

Zılgıt or *tilili* is predominantly the symbol of Kurdish identity as performed specially by Mesopotamia and North Iraq Kurdish. Furthermore, it is the symbol of woman gender as performed by women. In brief, the performing of *zılgıt* by Kurdish is the symbol of ethnic identity, the performing of *zılgıt* by women is the symbol of gender identity. Consequently, the assistance has been taken not only from gender identity but also from cultural and ethnic theories for analyzing of *zılgıt*.

Key Words: Gender Identity, Kurdish Identity, Middle East Woman, Music, *Lawij* (Dirge), *Govend* (folk dance), *zılgıt* (*tilili*).

**TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET DAVRANIŞLARI ve KÜRT KİMLİĞİ
ÇERÇEVESİNDE ORTA DOĞU KADINININ MÜZİKSEL ÜNLEMİ:
“ZILGIT” ya da “TİLİLİ”**

Özet

Bu çalışma, Kürtlerin müzikleri içinde ya da dışında kullandıkları zılgıtı, ‘toplumsal cinsiyet davranışları’ ve ‘Kürt kimliği’ çerçevesinde ele almak için oluşturuldu. Zılgıt, ya da Kürtçesiyle tilili, Orta Doğu kadınının derin keder ya da neşe içeren duygularını, genelde müzik içinde ama bazı zamanlarda da müzik dışında, dillerinin ağızlarının içinde hızlı bir biçimde oynatarak çıkardıkları sesin adıdır.

‘Zılgıt’ ya da ‘tilili’, özellikle Mezopotamya ve Kuzey Irak Kürtleri tarafından icra edildiği için, ağırlıklı olarak Kürt kimliğinin bir sembolüdür. Ayrıca yine kadınlar tarafından icra edildiği için kadın cinsel kimliğinin de bir sembolüdür. Kısacası zılgıtın Kürtler tarafından icra edilmesi etnik kimliğin, kadınlar tarafından icra edilmesi cinsel kimliğin bir göstergesidir. Dolayısıyla zılgıtın analizi için toplumsal cinsiyet teorilerinin yanısıra, etnisite ve kültürel kimlik teorilerinden de yardım alınmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Toplumsal Cinsiyet Davranışları, Kürt Kimliği, Orta Doğu Kadını, Müzik, ‘Ağıt’, ‘Halay’, ‘Zılgıt’ (Tilili).

INTRODUCTION

This study is constituted for explain *zılgıt* or *tilili* that is musical exclamation of Middle East Woman in the gender roles and Kurdish Identity. It is come upon the exclamational sounds composed by dancing the tongue in the mouth in North Africa and among Arabians and it is called '*hel hel*'. In this his study, it will be emphasized only the *zılgıt* or *tilili* that is in Middle East Region for achieving control of that behaviour that is come upon frequently and in this study, it will focus on mostly the Kurdish in Turkey.

The reasons of observing of the behaviour that is called *zılgıt* or *tilili*:

- 1- That practice belongs to Middle East and Kurdish.
- 2- It is an expression that shows sorrow and cheer, for that reason it is used mostly in dirge, folk dance and protesting meetings.
- 3- It is executed more effectively in music
- 4- It is a role belonging to woman gender.

Zılgıt that is a musical exclamation belonging to eastern woman in patriarchal societies lets us know about sentimentality and sensibility of woman to listeners with the way of folk dance and dirge. In the study, firstly it will be observed the importance of *zılgıt* in gender behaviors and Kurdish Identity, then the usage of it in music and as music with the framework of this concept.

1. ZILGIT: IT'S DESCRIPTION, FUNCTION AND IMPORTANCE IN KURDISH MUSIC

It is necessary to describe, show its function and after describe Kurdish music with general features, describe its place in Kurdish music before handling *zılgıt* with the context of gender identity and Kurdish identity.

1.1. Description and Functions of Zılgıt

Description of Zılgıt: That word having lots of meanings in Turkish but only one meaning of it corresponds with the state we mention here. First of all *zılgıt*s in Turkish is determined with the meanings of 'castigation, scolding, intimidation, provocation' and generally is used with the idiom 'getting *zılgıt*', secondly, (in some places in south eastern Anatolia) it is determined acclaiming by dancing the tongue in mouth, and '*zılgıt çekmek*' (performing *zılgıt*). (Turkish Dictionary 2004: 911).

However, the description is observed carefully, we see the second concept is missing. *Zılgıt* is an exclamation having high volume composed with by women, telling dirge and delirium with or without music with the fast actions of tongue in mouth in East-South-eastern region and Mesopotamia.

The Function of Zılgıt: First of all, *zılgıt* is a sorrow exclamation. Accordingly, it composes a very important part of dirges. *Zılgıt* has a function like increasing the volume of the sorrow especially in the dirges told for a person who died.

**BEHAVIOUR of WOMEN in the MIDDLE EAST within the FRAMEWORK OF
GENDER IDENTITY and KURDISH MUSICAL EXCLAMATION:
“ZILGIT” or “TİLİLİ”**

At the same time, zılgıt is a cheer exclamation. For that reason, it shows itself in taking bride, in coming bride and groom to the wedding place in folk dance and in all meetings as a cheer exclamation and a gender role given to the women. According to an event happened in 2001 and related to this state and told by Seçil Mustan¹, a girl student studying in Hacettepe, English language teaching department became cheerful as one of her teachers postponed the exam and started zılgıt, however the girl had to close her mouth by feeling embarrassed from the other students looking at her in an amazing way as the culture of zılgıt could not be known in the city she lived (capital city, Ankara). This event shows that zılgıt is not only a sorrow exclamation but also it is a cheer exclamation. The usage of zılgıt in dirge and folk dance will be illustrated in the later parts of study.

1.2. Importance of Zılgıt in Kurdish Music

It is necessary to describe the South East of Turkey and partly North Iraq and North East Syria's musical features in a general way. The music of Turkish and Kurdish societies living in the south-east of Turkey is similar to each other. Generally, we can separate this region's music in two parts as Kurdish art music and Kurdish folk music. However, from time to time, the features and instruments of these two kinds of music can affect each other. Both of them are music that is mostly mono and modal melody with the frame work of Middle East music features.

Kurdish art music is also called 'classical city music.' That form composes classical music and in addition to the modern effects, it is affected with Arab, Iran and Turkish cultures (Al-Salihi 2002: 147). The origin of Kurdish art music is Arab, Farsi and Middle East but it is similar to the other music in Middle East. Lute, violin, kanun, tanbur and reed flute is among the instruments of it.

As zılgıt is performed in dirge, folk dance and Kurdish folk music includes dirge and folk dance, zılgıt is a part of Kurdish folk music. Accordingly, in this study, it is necessary to be known Kurdish folk music with general features. According to Demir², we can group Kurdish folk music such as: song, epic, mystic Kurdish folk music, dirge and folk dance.

Songs (sitran): They are about both secular subjects such as: love, separation and subjects including politic and Newroz (New Year). As a style, the feature of Kurdish songs is having a wide sound of amplitude. Moreover, this style wants a masculine and slogan voice, speed and perfection by singing epic songs, in addition to these, it wants wide extensive traditional songs repertoire in different categories (Shiloah 2002: 62).

Epics (Dasitan): Epics is composed with the music by bards. Bard that is a Kurdish word means 'the expert of speech'. These people are expert musicians having the ability of improvisation like other bards and having a strong memory. It does not matter that which epic, fable or bravery stories we explicate, bard's piece of verses take attention as a determining component (Kayran 2002: 510). Long Kurdish epics

Banu MUSTAN DÖNMEZ

such as: Mim ü Zen, Zembilfiroşu or long Kurdish events are composed by bards. Instruments like bağlama or tanbur company with the song lyrics of bards.

Elegy (lawij): Dirges is separated two parts: death dirges composing with free rhythm and melody and dirges in the form of rhythmic song. It is possible to take this category not only Kurdish ones but also all of the dirges. Kurdish women say the dirges describing death so much as they have economical, social, political problems (Kızıldemir 2002: 394-96).

Folk Dance (govend): These folk dances remembered with the names of like horon, hora are played with drum and horn in a rhythmic way and they are played in wedding, engagement, circumcision ceremonies. The people's arms joining in halay attach to each other. The movements compose with bending and standing, hopping and levitating of arms in a rhythmic way (Shiloah 2002: 67).

Mystic Kurdish Folk Music: Mystic Kurdish folk music is composed by mostly Kurdish Alevis or the societies like the *Ehl-i Hak people* living in Middle East and having Heterodoks beliefs for their religious ceremony and the religious ceremony of these societies is similar to the other societies living Anatolia but not being Kurdish (Bayrak 2002: 233-237). It includes holy songs generally played with the *bağlama* (instrument with tree-double string), specially administered by religious lieder (*dede* it means grandfather, a religious lieder of Alevis) and with a ceremony named *cem*. In addition to that, there are some Kurdish still having Zoroastrianism's features and saying the words having beliefs with the quadrants (*şewane*). However, these quadrants are not so common.

Other Kinds: There are lots of music kinds in Kurdish folk music such as: Flockman music, lullabies (*lori*), stanza (*mani*) and music including protest. But it is not focused on the kinds of Kurdish music in this study.

Kurdish music can be grouped in such a way, specially the Kurdish music being in the South-Eastern of Turkey, in the north of Iraq and in the north-east of Syria. However; it is not forgotten that we can think neither only one Kurdish community nor Kurdish music. The detailed description of Kurdish music is not the main focal point of this study. Accordingly, the most important point about zılgıt is that zılgıt is composed in the songs including high emotional excitement such as: folk dance and dirge and the songs like that. So, the importance of dirge in Kurdish music should be handled in that way.

2. THE PLACE OF ZILGIT IN 'GENDER BEHAVIOUR' AND 'KURDISH IDENTITY'

Zılgıt, above discussed its description, etymology and the place in Kurdish music, here will be observed with the content of gender behaviour and Kurdish identity. The main reason observing the zılgıt with these two contents is that it is related to these two points. Because, zılgıt is used frequently among the Kurdish women living in the East and Middle East Anatolia.

www.e-dusbed.com

Düsbed, Yıl 5, Sayı 9, Nisan 2013

**BEHAVIOUR of WOMEN in the MIDDLE EAST within the FRAMEWORK OF
GENDER IDENTITY and KURDISH MUSICAL EXCLAMATION:
“ZILGIT” or “TİLİLİ”**

2.1. Gender Behavior and Theories

Women behaviors and culture have been started to be observed under the name of ‘gender behaviours’ in social science in recent years that the patriarchal community structure has changed in favor of women. For that reason, the magnifier is taken also the women like the homosexuals, emigrants and other flocks until today.

The meaning of the ‘social gender’ is different from the biological gender. Feminists, specially Simone de Beauvoir denied a relation between biological gender and social, historical and cultural gender. The famous sentence of Simone de Beauvoir ‘you can not born woman, you become woman’ has an important role in that aspect. In other word, social gender implies the roles and tasks depending on gender (Dökmen 2004: 4-5).

Transition from matriarchal to partriarchal has been slowly and slowly. The origin of this transition goes from hunting and collecting to agriculture and animal husbandry in our time. Social system that is still related to partriarchal constitution is the most important determiner of gender behaviour. But the style of partriarchal constitution is different from region to region and society and society. The determiner of that difference is absolutely the role given to woman by society. Not only the family structure of Catholic and Protestant but also the family structure between in the east and west Anatolia similar to each other. Accordingly, the theories about gender behaviours changing from culture to culture, like each social subject; it will have an important function for musicology subject.

2.2. Zilgit as an Extension of Social Gender Behaviors in the Music Practices

“Since gender is a symbol of social and political order, and the control of gender behavior is a means of controlling that order, gender boundaries can not be seperated from other social and political boundaries” (Stokes 1997: 22). Because music practice is a following part of social, cultural and political elements, it gives important clues about analysis of social gender. Because it is possible to see the status given to women by the society and so the data related to the independence of women in items which are in music pratices as they are seen in the other items of culture.

The status of women in musical practices in parallel with the volume of patriarchy is against women in music venues where live music is done, in the media world and in the area of religious music. That situation is handled by feminist musicologist Suzan McClary too. McClary points that patriarchal social structure reflects to sexual politics belonging to classical music (McClary 2002: 54). She has analysed works of many composers such as Bizet den Monteverdi to prove her opinion. It has been analysed by Abt that the same patriarchal structure has a place in music videos in which women are used as a meta for men (Abt 2000: 132-133). Mustan Dönmez has emphasized in his work which is about music relation and strategies of domination that power relations belongs to a society reflects directly to

www.e-dusbed.com

Düsbed, Yıl 5, Sayı 9, Nisan 2013

Banu MUSTAN DÖNMEZ

music. Author has show the presence of domination strategies which were divided into public or hidden by author in the musical practices of patriarchal communities and he has showed with his examples that woman is not used in musical practices of those communities or woman is used as a sexual object in music practices of those communities (Mustan Dönmez 2010: 83-85).

Because music practices make an important data pool related to sexual behaviours of a community and it gives important clues about the place and status of women in the society; in the following stages of that study, the analyse which will be done about zilgit will illuminate us from a different side. Therefore, zilgit which is a kind of meaningful and rare joining of women to music is really important in terms of the quality of status belonging to women in the Middle East community.

Anatolia is a heterogeneous structure not only because of cultural structure but also in terms of women status. It is known that the independence area of woman in the west, with the effect of European culture, is wider in Anatolia that has a structure with lots of culture and quality. On the other hand in the Eastern geography, if it is compared to the west of the Anatolia, has a more feudal structure because there are honor killings, violence against women, the women separated from men lifes which are formed by gender discrimination, covered clothing, wide family structures, lots of children, needs for community not for individuals. Because of that structure, the indepenca area of women is getting narrower from west to east. We can list feauters of classical patriarhchal system in which Turkey, Middle East Asia and South East Asia take place: Authority is in the hand of old man who comes from male descendants in the wide family structure; prestige patterns depend on age; there are different hierarchies for men and women; the activity area of different genders separates; the reproductive capacity and effort of women have been arrested by male descendants to whom they will marry” (Çağlayan 2007: 38-39).

According to Çakmak³, zilgit performance has an important place in folk dance and elegy connected to East and South East Anatolia. Namely, zilgit is a musical exclamation as it has mentioned above. Because sadness of elegy and lyric of folk dance are connoted with zilgit. So zilgit is an expressing form in which women connote their feelings.

In traditional patriarchal societies, men’s hierarchical superiority on women requires keeping their authority via men’s traditional behavior strategies. In those societies, uttering men’s laughing, crying, scaring feelings with communication styles such as music, lyrics, mimic and tear is seen as weakness and it is a taboo. Even in conservative communities, because all behaviors which are thought as showing the inner world of men such as liking their children has been seen as authority shocking, these behaviors have been censorshipped by society. Anyway “crying taboo” which is an important part of authority development strategy belongs to patriarchal communities

www.e-dusbed.com

Düsbed, Yıl 5, Sayı 9, Nisan 2013

***BEHAVIOUR of WOMEN in the MIDDLE EAST within the FRAMEWORK OF
GENDER IDENTITY and KURDISH MUSICAL EXCLAMATION:
“ZILGIT” or “TİLİLİ”***

has been understood indirectly from the saying “men do not cry” which is an Anatolian proverb (Mustan Dönmez 2008: 145-146).

Women have fulfilled that function in patriarchal societies, there a son of this is hidden exactly at that point. Especially, in the East geography, showing your feelings clearly has been perceived as weakness. Soon one of the strategies forming charisma is that especially leaders or people who are from upper hierarchical platforms do not show their feeling sand they do not cry, laugh and get angry. So zilgit in which feelings are expressed is a role attributed to women. Although in patriarchal society, here is a musical exclamation attributed to Eastern women; zilgit which is used in elegies and folk dances shows emotionalism and sensitivity belong to women.

2.3. Zilgit as an Extension of Kurdish Identity in the Music Practices

Although every kind of migration and diasporic cooperations, as ethnic and congregations communities give direction to social associations, it provides that social scientists think about the ‘identity’ more deeply. Identity is a belonging feeling providing the person giving the answer ‘who are you’ or ‘which descent do you belong’ the identity is not only individual but also collective emotion state. Collective aspect of identity has been defined as a collective, cultural or ethnic identity. The sense of identity of that meaning is related to efforts of creating a collective history that will be a reference source by building the differences of itself (Bilgin 1999: 63).

Identity is not only a sense that has been felt and drawn the direction of community organizations but also it has been a meaning through the behaviors. Therefore, Hall observes the identity as a feeling state including the answers the questions such as: Its historical background, its expression, its language, its culture and ‘who are we’ and ‘where do we come from (Hall 2000: 4). The expression of identity through behaviors takes places through the culture transmitted from one generation to others. Therefore, there is a tight relationship between identity and culture. Culture delivers identity through the codes given to the opposite side.

Accordingly, music that has been a part of culture must be handled as an important symbol of identity because it expresses identity. Especially folk music that has been an ethnicity is not independent from identity. So, music is one of the important tools used in the process of construction of an ethnic or national identity. We can give the example of Baily’s study that observed the role of music in the creation of Afghan identity or the study of Mach observed the situation that Chopin played a vital role in Poland national identity⁴ for this situation (Baily 1997: 57-58; Mach 1997: 67).

Zilgit plays a vital role in Kurdish ethnic identity. Therefore, in this study, zilgit will be dealt with as a code of Kurdish ethnicity in the music. Accordingly, first

www.e-dusbed.com

Düsbed, Yıl 5, Sayı 9, Nisan 2013

Banu MUSTAN DÖNMEZ

of all, it is necessary to stand on Kurdish identity and the origin of the Kurds. According to Özoğlu, Kurdish nationalism is an intellectual and political movement. According to him, Kurdish nationalists led by the leaders of Kurdish are those who are participating in Kurdish political movements in an active manner and developing the idea of ethnic-based community and historical homeland (Özoğlu 2005: 19-20). “The Kurds think that the identity of consciousness of their own will provide a spiritual power to them. Kurdish nationalism and awarenesses has reached its peak at the end of the 20. Century and the beginning of this century” (Ibid 32).

Theories of the origin of Kurdish, there are lots of theories such as: they came from Karduk community in South-eastern region, they came from Iran (the Meds), they are Arabian, they are European, they are Sümer, and even they are Turkish. However; the common belief is that they are grandchildren of Meds. Although there is not any agreement among the theories about the origins of Kurdish, it is known that the community is mostly in the region of Mesopotamia (Memiş 2002: 133-135; Nikitine 2008: 46-55; Qasımlo 2009: 53-55).

Because, it is thought as a political tool the data about demography of Kurdish are not coherent to each other. According to Nezan, in the east and south-east of Turkey almost 15-18 millions, in the west of Iran 8 millions, in the north-east of Iraq 5 millions, in the north-west of Syria 1,5 millions, in Diaspora 500 thousand and in Israel almost 100 thousand Kurdish have been living (Nezan 2008: 22-24). But, according to Qasımlo, in Turkey almost 5 million, in Iran 3,3 million, in Iraq 1,5 million, in Syria 0,5 million and in Diaspora almost 1 million, totally there are 10 million Kurdish (Qasımlo 2009: 42-43). Although, there is not any coherent with the demography of Kurdish, the common belief about the region they live is that they mostly live in the east and South-East Anatolia, in the North-East of Syria, in the East of Iraq and in the West of Iran.

Bohlman has asserted that the style and repertoire belonging to folk music is the social association pointer of the groups (Bohlman 1988: 4-5). There is a same situation for the Kurdish music. The origin of the zılgıt culture belongs to Kurdish. The clearest evidence of this situation is the difference between the cities Malatya and Diyarbakır about performance of zılgıt. Malatya is a region that Kurdish demography and Kurdish culture has less effect in the other hand; Diyarbakır is a region that Kurdish lives in a most common way. For that reason, zılgıt is more common in Diyarbakır. However; as Kurdish and Turkish have lived in a common geography in East and South-East Anatolia, lots of songs and halay have a common melody, Turkish and Kurdish version. It can be shown *Şemmamme* (a kind of folk dances) and *kına havası* (a song of henna night: a kind of song which sung in henna night for celebrating the bride) as an example of this situation. Accordingly, especially in folk dances zılgıt can be composed in both languages. Nevertheless; we can say for the zılgıt culture that

www.e-dusbed.com

Düsbed, Yıl 5, Sayı 9, Nisan 2013

**BEHAVIOUR of WOMEN in the MIDDLE EAST within the FRAMEWORK OF
GENDER IDENTITY and KURDISH MUSICAL EXCLAMATION:
“ZILGIT” or “TİLİLİ”**

it belongs to Kurdish as it is used more in Kurdish songs and folk dances than in Turkish songs and folk dances.

The other evidence that zılgıt belongs to Kurdish is used this tradition in the political meetings that Kurdish identity looms large as a Kurdish symbol. As Stokes claim ‘Music is intensely involved in the propagation of dominant classifications, and has been a tool in the hands of new states in developing world, or rather, of those classes which have the highest stake in these new social formations’ (Stokes 1997: 10). Accordingly, the zılgıt that is a symbol of Kurdish identity has been used mostly as a propaganda tool in the arena of politics. The usage of zılgıt in the arena of politics and in politics meetings as a symbol of identity is for the reason that like O’Flaynn said the relation among nation-country-music and Stokes claimed that music is intensely has been a propagation tool specially in the progress of building a new state. For example, the president of republic is welcomed with zılgıt in his Diyarbakır tour in 30 December 2010 (O’Flayn 2007: 24-25; Stokes 1997: 10; <http://www.t24.com.tr/haberdetay/119530.aspx>). Moreover; Kurdish women belonging Peace and Democracy (BDP) representing Kurdish in Turkey performed their protestation activity for the force, cruelty and aggression to woman with zılgıt in Viranşehir, in Şanlıurfa in 24 November 2010 (<http://www.focushaber.com/kadinlar-siddeti-protesto-etti-h-12589.html>). In addition to these, the meeting wanted double languages life, Turkish and Kurdish, and supported by Democratic Community Party (DTP) arranged with the zılgıt in Yüksekova, in Hakkari, in 7 January 2011 (<http://www.haberjet.com/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=752180>). Moreover; Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that went to Diyarbakır for the ‘yes’ tour for referendum wanted zılgıt from the crowd by saying ‘where is the zılgıt?’ in 3 September 2010 (<http://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/124585>). This and a lot of similar examples shows that zılgıt symbolize Kurdish identity.

3. SOME SAMPLES RELATED TO ZILGIT PERFORMANCE

Some examples will be shown concerned with the usage fields of zılgıt above we observed as a symbol of Kurdish and woman identity. Zılgıt helps representing cheer in folk dances (*halay or govend*), deep sorrow in *uzun hava* (unmetered and sad folk song), delirium in protest music and in meeting fields.

As it has mentioned above, there are many types in which zılgıt performed such as elegy, folk dance, rally for meeting and it has been used as exclamation to be able to enrich the senses of joy or sadness. So there is not a rule to perform zılgıt. Because zılgıt is an intensity of emotion which comes from community, it will be performed suddenly by women. Zılgıt is generally performed in the entrance of folk song or immediately after 2-4 rhythm which comes after entrance by women as an

www.e-dusbed.com

Düşbed, Yıl 5, Sayı 9, Nisan 2013

**BEHAVIOUR of WOMEN in the MIDDLE EAST within the FRAMEWORK OF
GENDER IDENTITY and KURDISH MUSICAL EXCLAMATION:
“ZILGIT” or “TİLİLİ”**



In the entrances of two folk songs above, zilgit has been shown with symbol of ‘tril’ in the musical note. Because the timbre structure of zilgit which is formed by moving tongue quickly in the mouth has vibration and a little bit resemblance of tril, zilgit is expressed with tril in the musical note.

CONCLUSION

Zilgit (tilili) is an exclamation providing delirium in the surroundings with or without music. The reason that the original name of it being tilili in Eastern and South-Eastern Regions is resulted from the fast movement of tongue in mouth resembling the sound of tilili.

In this study, the zilgit or tilili that is a social exclamation has been observed with the framework of ‘gender identity’ and ‘Kurdish identity’ and examples have been given for the zilgit used for folk songs. Zilgit or tilili mostly is a symbol of Kurdish identity as composed by specially Mesopotamia and North Iraq Kurdish. Nevertheless; it is a symbol of woman identity as performed by women. Shortly, zilgit’s performed by Kurdish, it is the indicator of ethnic identity, it’s composed by women; it is the indicator of gender identity.

Specially in East, patriarchal societies, performing the zilgit in the circumstances of deep sorrow and hilarity is a social role for women because it is thought that a weakness for man expressing their sorrow and hilarity with their sounds and behavior (such as crying, screaming, beating one’s breast) and that thought is supported with the dictum of ‘Men don’t cry’. This musical exclamation is both one of the local and gender behavior and one of the precious examples of women sensibility in Middle East music by the reason of a performance belonging with Middle East Kurdish Women. Accordingly, such a study will have an important contribution for being known Middle East Culture.

Banu MUSTAN DÖNMEZ

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www.e-dusbed.com

Düsbed, Yıl 5, Sayı 9, Nisan 2013

**BEHAVIOUR of WOMEN in the MIDDLE EAST within the FRAMEWORK OF
GENDER IDENTITY and KURDISH MUSICAL EXCLAMATION:
“ZILGİT” or “TİLİLİ”**

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¹ Seçil Mustan, an English Teacher from Manisa, TURKEY; she told her experience with zılgıt that she experienced, 2004 dated interview.

² Mustafa Demir, a boy student from Diyarbakır; originally being Kurdish; a student in Music Department,

in Fine Arts and Design Faculty in Inonu University, 17-01-2011 dated interview.

³ Çakmak, Serpil. 23.11.2010 dated interview, a girl student from Diyarbakır, originally being Kurdish

and performing zılgıt; a student in Music Department, in Fine Arts Academy in Inonu University.