In the previous two chapters, I looked at Kurdistan TV’s programs and analyzed the discursive construction of Kurdish identities that are enabled and disseminated by the channel. I illustrated that KTV’s discourse of national identity to a large extent reflects its owner’s interests and ideologies. Owned by a regional political organization, KTV mainly constructs a regional and Iraqi Kurdish identity, but at the same time, it engages in subtle and implicit discursive constructions of a cross-border Kurdish identity. Overall, the channel’s discourse practices are carried out within the ideological framework and political interests of its owner, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

The purpose of this chapter and the next is to investigate how Kurds use the Internet to present themselves and to construct, negotiate, and articulate their identities. The Kurdish Internet is important insofar as it gives voice to those who cannot afford to broadcast on satellite television channels, which are exclusively owned by dominant Kurdish political organizations. Thus, unless I find it useful for the purpose of contextualization, in this chapter and the next, I will not be concerned with online activities of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq or the major Kurdish political parties. Instead, I will be focusing on smaller political organizations, societies, and individuals.

I assume that the Internet provides alternative communicative spaces for different discourse practices and discursive constructions of Kurdish identities. I also assume that, in contrast to KTV, Kurdish cyber activities are in significant ways devoted to explicit and overt construction and reproduction of a cross-border and pan-Kurdish identity. Finally, it is assumed that because online communication within a community in important ways depends on a shared language, Kurds might seem more fragmented than unified.
when judged by their online activities. To test the validity of these assumptions the following three questions are posed: (1) What are the main features or constituents of the Kurdish Internet? (2) What roles could these constituents play in the processes of negotiation and articulation of Kurdish identities? (3) Are the discourse practices fostered by the Kurdish online resources unifying or further fragmenting Kurdish identity? I will answer these questions after introducing my data.

The Internet data for this study were accumulated during my active observation of Kurdish online activities from 1998 to 2009. They consist of numerous screen shots, images, video clips, and textual content of the following Internet sources: Kurdish web directories, websites, chat rooms, weblogs, and forums. Most of the data have been collecting through what can be termed guerrilla ethnography (Androutsopoulos, 2006; Yang, 2003). Parts of data, however, have been collected in more systematic ways. For example, the entire blogging activities of two Kurdish bloggers, starting in 2002, have been downloaded. Furthermore, the data also consist of a two-hour video recording of an online session of Kurdish bloggers on the Internet chat service Paltalk on April 14, 2004. In addition, my data encompass personal communications with webmasters, chat-room administrators (moderators), and webloggers (bloggers). Moreover, the data are accompanied by various media outlets’ reports and interviews about Kurdish online activities. Finally, the data for this study are enriched by my personal involvement in online activities from 1998, which has enabled me to gain some useful inside knowledge about the affordances and also constraints of the Internet with respect to Kurdish online activities.

In what follows, I will provide an overview of Kurdish cyber activities or the major constituents of Kurdish Internet. I am particularly interested in identifying alternative voices in platforms such as websites, chat rooms, weblogs and forums (discussion groups) that do not seem to be owned by the dominant Kurdish political organizations or the host states but rather by individuals, social activists and societies. To locate these internet sources, I have mainly relied on Kurdish web directories such as www.Koord.com, which in May 2007 indexed about 2,500 websites and 6,500 links to Kurdish Internet sources (B. N., personal communication, May 24, 2007). In analysing Figure 7.1, I have divided these websites and online sources into the following categories: websites, chat-rooms, weblogs, and other constituents (Erikson, 2007). To avoid repetition, and in order not to take up too much space in the text, I will cite websites and Internet sources either