Waves of feminism in Turkey: Kemalist, Islamist and Kurdish women's movements in an era of globalization

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Introduction

Women's movements in the West have followed a historical sequence from the suffragette movement in the late 19th century to contemporary emphases on differences and identity politics. Although there have always been ideological variations and appropriation of different political stances within feminism, for our purposes here, we will utilize the common breakdown of the feminist movement into three waves.[1] The first wave of feminism in the Anglo-Saxon world evolved around the struggle for civil and political rights, for instance, women's right to education, to work, and to vote and be elected.[2] In Turkey, the first wave of feminism occurred in the early 20th century, when women's organizations of the time, albeit small in number, targeted equality in civic and political rights. The Kemalist ideal of becoming a Westernized society required legal equality between all citizens irrespective of gender. The women's organizations' claims, therefore, overlapped with the Kemalist reform process when the country was going through an immense change in the 1920s and 1930s in the aftermath of the foundation of a new state from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire.[3]

The second wave of feminism in Turkey was a latecomer when compared with its counterpart in the West. Instead of the 1960s, the 1980s in Turkey were the years during which the feminist movement brought up issues common to second wave feminism in the West, such as the elimination of violence against women bringing to light the oppression that women experienced in the family, the use of sexuality as a medium for male dominance, the misrepresentation of women in the media and the challenge against virginity tests—a common practice for women who are about to get married or who have been subject to sexual assault. The motto 'personal is political' started to be recalled only with the second wave.[4]

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[1] Stacey Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford (eds), *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2004; Linda Nicholson (ed.), *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, Routledge, New York, 1997; Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2002.

[2] Ellen Carol Dubois, *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights*, New York University Press, New York, 1998.

[3] The major legislation that impacted women's lives was the 1926 Civic Code by which the rules of Western lifestyles were adopted in place of the Ottoman code. The banning of polygamy and the granting of property rights to women were some of the radical changes that the new code introduced.

[4] Şirin Tekeli, '1980'ler Türkiye'sinde kadınlar', in Şirin Tekeli (ed.), *1980'ler Türkiye'sinde Kadın Bakış Açısından Kadınlar*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1990, p. 33.

The 1990s, however, inaugurated a new phase in the women's movement in Turkey as there emerged cleavages in feminism with the challenge of the Islamist, Kurdish nationalist and the gay–lesbian–bisexual–transsexual (GLBT) movements, each of which had diverse worldviews with respect to the causal roots of and solutions to women's problems. As Western feminism started to acknowledge plurality in the understanding of the 'woman' question with the rise of alternative perspectives of black, lesbian and/or non-Western women, likewise, Turkish feminists encountered the challenge of different conceptualizations of the 'woman' question and the politics of identity/difference.[5] The rise of identity politics brought about a change of actors, rhetoric and themes in Turkish politics.[6] Kurdish nationalism brought about a mass movement in the east and south-east regions and the movement demanded Kurds' cultural rights (although it would not be right to confine these demands to cultural rights alone). Kurdish women's groups pinpointed the dual exploitation that Kurdish women have experienced in the patriarchal tribal system dominant in Kurdish culture and the imperialist system that the centralist Turkish state has imposed on Kurdish people. Political Islam, on the other hand, targeted Western imperialism and criticized the cultural, economic and political imperialism that the USA and European countries exerted on the people of the South, and especially on Muslim societies, including Turkey. As Islamists demanded more religious freedom and the curtailing of secularism, Islamist women have sought ways to complement feminist politics with Islamist values.[7] The ban on wearing headscarves at universities has come to be the major arena for Islamist feminist activism. Islamic women's organizations have taken an active part in protests on the streets and at university gates. Islamist women writers, activists, philosophers, researchers, lawyers, human rights defendants, etc. sought to deconstruct the misuse of the Koran which has been used to dominate women and confine them to the private sphere. They aimed to display the manipulation of religious verses and sayings against women. The rise of a global civil society and the internationalization of women's organizations added further dimensions to the Kurdish and Islamist feminist positions. In addition, the EU membership process, underway since 1999, has given women's organizations in Turkey the possibility of accessing foreign funds. The number of women's organizations as well as the projects that these organizations conduct have increased, opening up a discussion of whether feminism has been turned into 'project feminism' (developmentalist, short-scaled, short-termed, ad hoc and issue-based), corroding the political elements of the movement.[8]

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[5] For discussions on identity politics and the problematic of equality/difference, see Seyla Benhabib (ed.), *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1996; Chantal Mouffe (ed.), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship and Community*, Verso, London and New York, 1992; Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1990.

[6] Ayşe Ayata, 'The emergence of identity politics in Turkey', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 17, Fall 1997.

[7] Margot Badran, 'Between secular and Islamic feminism/s: reflections on the Middle East and beyond', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 1(1), January 2005, pp. 6–28.

[8] Özgür Sevgi Göral, 'Feminizmler ve şiddet', *Mesele*, March 2007; Aksu Bora and Asena Günal (eds), *90'larda Türkiye'de Feminizm*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2002, p. 74.

This paper has two goals. One of them is to illustrate the evolution of the women's movement in Turkey in terms of three waves of feminist perspectives and practices. The literature on feminism in Turkey has already laid out the identifying characteristics and boundaries of an independent feminist movement in Turkey.[9] Yet, a historical trajectory of the Turkish feminist movement that summarizes the changes it has undergone in terms of waves has the potential to complement the existing studies. It will yield a simplified and clarified understanding of the connections between changing political conjectures and the changing agendas for feminist activism. The second goal of this paper is to highlight the contemporary aspects of feminism in Turkey. The paper aims to discuss how mainstream Turkish feminism has been influenced and has evolved with the rise of Kurdish nationalism and Islamic revivalism, and will also go into the influences of globalization and international civil society. Such a scope not only introduces the current aspects and changing actors within feminism in Turkey but also constructs a profile of contemporary Turkish politics through the lenses of women and feminist movements.

This paper will fulfil these goals in four sections. In the first part of the paper, we will focus on the foundations of the independent women's movement in Turkey, specifically on the early stages of feminism—the first and second waves. This section will provide a background for our readers on the development of feminist politics from the early years of the Republic until the 1990s. The second part of the paper will discuss the ideological tensions and splintering that the feminist movement faced after the 1990s with the rise of Islamism and Kurdish nationalism. The third section of the paper will carry the discussion from internal politics and the local level to the supra-national and inter-governmental levels. While still taken into consideration in the third wave, the trends for an internationalization of local feminist themes, the growing influence of international organizations (i.e. the EU, UN, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, WAVE, etc.) and the reception of global aid to combat women's subordination brought about novel changes in the women's movement. This section will focus mainly on the transformation that the third wave feminism in Turkey has been going through since 2000. The fourth part of the paper makes a brief summary of the points delivered throughout the paper. In this final part, we will also speculate on the future of the Turkish feminist movement in light of the historical trajectory presented.

Kemalist ideals and the emergence of an independent women's movement in Turkey: the first and second waves of feminism

After the establishment of the Republic in 1923, the Turkish state initiated certain legal, educational and social reforms which targeted rapid modernization, urbanization and Westernization. The aim of the newly founded state was the construction of a modern society. In the implementation of modernization policies, women were perceived as playing an instrumental role. The Republican

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[9] Simten Coşar and Funda Gencoğlu Onbaşı, 'Women's movement in Turkey at a crossroads: from women's rights advocacy to feminism', *South European Society and Politics*, 13(3), 2008, pp. 325–344.

reforms signalled the new positioning of the state vis-à-vis women.[10] Women as homemakers and as mothers who would raise future generations of 'citizens' according to the ideals of the state were to disseminate the values of the Republic. In addition to their roles in the household, women were to take part in the public sphere in areas of education and work.[11] The Kemalist project, therefore, coincided with the demands of the women's movement, one of which was to have access to the public sphere on equal terms with men.[12] The Kemalist reforms included restriction of the wearing of traditional clothes such as the fez, support for Western dress norms for both women and men, and the adoption of the Swiss Civil Code. Thanks to this code, Turkish women were granted formal equality with men in divorce, inheritance and custody over children. Yet, the women's movement at the time, in its resemblance to the suffragettes of the West, also demanded the right to vote and to be elected. They lobbied and tried to influence the Republican leaders to grant these political rights. Nezihe Muhittin, one of the prominent woman activists of the time, even attempted to found a political party campaigning only to obtain women's right to vote and be elected.

The leaders of the Republic, however, rejected the founding of a women's party and recommended that she found a women's association instead. It was in this context that the Turkish Women's Union (*Türk Kadınlar Birliği*) was founded. The visibility of women in politics was also an important concern for the Republican project of modernization. Due to women's campaigning and the Republican state's affirmative response, voting rights were granted to women first in municipal elections in 1930 and then in general elections in 1934. There was a downside to all the gains in the legal arena via the Kemalist reforms: Turkish women had to accept a myth propagated by the Republic. This myth was that Turkish women had equal rights with men. This 'equality' was put forth as the pretext by the Republican leaders to argue that women's organizations were no longer needed in Turkey.[13] The Women's Union was perceived as having too much of an independent voice in the public realm, as being sectarian and individualistic, and somehow threatening to the national interest.[14] Hence, after the ratification of the legislation that allowed women's political rights, the Turkish Women's Union was closed in 1935. This marked the end of the first wave of feminism in Turkey and women's political silence lasted until the 1980s, the period associated with the rise of the second wave of feminism in Turkey. Turkey's political atmosphere in the 1950s was complicated with the transition to multi-party politics, as there occurred three *coup d'états* leaving little ground for civilian affairs which was neither fertile for the consolidation of democracy in Turkey nor the involvement of women's groups in politics.

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[10] Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Women and the Turkish state: political actors or symbolic pawns?', in N. Yuval-Davis and F. Anthias (eds), *Women–Nation–State*, Macmillan, London, 1989, p. 126.

[11] Şule Toktaş and Dilek Cindoğlu, 'Modernisation and gender: a study of girls' technical education in Turkey since 1927', *Women's History Review*, 15(5), 2006, pp. 737–749.

[12] It has to be noted that the women's movement in the 1920s and 1930s was composed mainly of a few women's organizations and some individual elite women located in Istanbul. These women were coming from upper- or upper-middle-class families and had higher levels of education in comparison to the general level of the society.

[13] Şirin Tekeli, 'Europe, European feminism, and women in Turkey', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 15(1), 1992, pp. 139–143.

[14] Yeşim Arat, 'From emancipation to liberation', *Journal of International Affairs*, 54(1), 2000, pp. 107–123.

The second wave of the women's movement in Turkey is closely associated with the social and political environment at the time it came about. This was the period after the military coup in 1980; all the political parties were closed down except those few which were newly founded and strictly controlled by the military; many of the leaders of the political parties, labour unions and political organizations were banned from politics; the youth and women's branches of banned political parties were also ruled to be illegal; and a new constitution was enacted in 1982 that outlined a very limited framework for individual rights and freedoms. The ideological confrontation between leftist and right-wing groups that had led to the political instability as well as violence of the 1970s served as the major reasoning for the military's intervention in politics and hence brought about a depoliticized environment in the 1980s. Yet, surprisingly, it was at this moment, when there were serious legal and political barriers to political expression and participatory civil society that an independent women's movement developed.

Some feminist scholars argue that the rise of the women's movement in this period was partly due to the opportunities presented by the imprisonment of many male activists and leaders of leftist organizations. Formerly leftist women not only questioned and gave accounts of what went wrong regarding the leftist movement in the 1970s, but they also questioned their positions as women within these leftist organizations.[15] In pre-1980 coup politics, women in Turkey found themselves a place in the political sphere only through the left- and right-wing groups that monopolized the political agenda and spectrum in the 1970s. Turkish women who were influenced by Western feminism could speak out only after the 1980 military intervention had destroyed the influence of the 'patriarchal left' in Turkey.[16] Those questioning women's status in society were mostly urban, middle-class, well-educated, professional women.

The major issue that women took up and carried to the streets as part of their political agenda was the issue of violence against women. In 1987, a demonstration involving 3000 women in Istanbul was organized and this was followed by a campaign launched to raise solidarity amongst women in the struggle against violence. What initiated the demonstration was the decision of a judge who ruled against a woman's plea for divorce on the grounds that women needed to be beaten in order to be controlled. This demonstration was a turning point, because it was the first time that women were on the streets to fight for women's rights. In accordance with the famous slogan of second wave feminism in the West—'personal is political'—Turkish women framed violence not as an individual matter in the domestic realm but as a political topic that needed to be dealt with in the public realm.

The late 1980s hosted other campaigns and demonstrations as well. In the metropolitan cities of Izmir, Ankara and Istanbul, the Purple Needle campaign (*Mor İğne*) was launched, during which women voiced their concerns over physical and sexual abuse on public transportation vehicles. Women also organized various activities (i.e. petitions, demonstrations on the streets, press

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[15] Nicole A. N. M. Van Os, 'Ottoman Muslim and Turkish women in an international context', *European Review*, 13(3), 2005, pp. 459–479.

[16] Fatmagül Berktay, 'Türkiye solu'nun kadına bakışı: Değişen bir şey var mı?', in Şirin Tekeli (ed.), *1980'ler Türkiye'sinde Kadın Bakış Açısından Kadınlar*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1990, p. 317.

conferences and lobbying to the women parliamentarians) to change certain laws and court verdicts that discriminate against women such as the following: the requirement that wives get permission from their husbands to be eligible for employment in the business sector, the use of the man's surname as the family name, men being recognized as head of the household and men's right to decide on the schooling of the children as well as on the house that the family will live in.[17] Another important demonstration during this period protested the Minister of Family Affairs' declaration that there was no difference between a woman's flirting with a man and the practice of prostitution.

The energy of the second wave of Turkish feminism initiated a number of attempts to institutionalize the women's movement. In 1990, a Women's Library (*Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı*), which collects scholarly and literary works on women and by women, was established in Istanbul. Also, various women's groups started publishing periodicals that discussed women's issues. For example, 44 women's periodicals or magazines were published between 1980 and 1990 and 63 between 1990 and 1996 in Turkey.[18] Universities started to establish research centres on women's issues and departments of women's studies at the graduate level. Istanbul University and Marmara University in Istanbul, Ankara University and Middle East Technical University in Ankara, 9 Eylül University in Izmir and Çukurova University in Adana opened women's studies programmes. The second wave women's movement also targeted the establishment of consultancy centres and shelters for battered women. The Purple Roof (*Mor Çatı*) was founded in 1990. The foundation first initiated a 24-hour hotline for battered women to call for support to find secure accommodation; it also provided medical and/or legal advice and then established a shelter for women at risk in 1995. The establishment of KA-DER is another example of the institutionalization of the women's movement at the societal level. The goal of the organization is to increase women's political participation and representation as well as to lobby for laws and regulations to bring quotas to forcefully increase the number of women in decision-making positions. Since the beginning of the 1990s, other women's organizations were established all throughout the country, though mostly in urban areas, some specifically to provide support and shelter for battered women and some to enhance women's status and respond to their problems in general. According to the statistics of the Flying Broom Association (*Uçan Süpürge*) which works to provide a network among women's associations, the number of women's organizations did not exceed 10 between the years 1973 and 1982; between 1983

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[17] In 1990, the law was amended such that women would no longer be required to get permission from their husbands in order to be employed. In 1997, married women gained the right to keep their own last names (along with their husbands') and from 1998 onwards, adultery was no longer considered a crime. In 1998, a law that required the intervention of the police in cases of violence against women and children was passed.

[18] The periodical *Pazartesi* whose publication started in 1995 had a unique place in these journals. It sold 2500–3000 copies every month and had 500 subscribed readers. More importantly, it brought women from different religious, ethnic or ideological backgrounds together and gave them an opportunity to express political discontent as well as a medium through which they could discuss their different political persuasions. Yeşim Arat, 'Rethinking the political: a feminist journal in Turkey, Pazartesi', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 27(3), 2004, pp. 281–292.

and 1992, they amounted to 64 and by the year 2004 there were more than 350 women's organizations.[19]

It is also possible to observe the reflections of the institutionalization of the movement in terms of the restructuring of state organizations. In 1990, a division that was in charge of improving the rights and status of women in society was established by the Prime Ministry. Today, in 2009, there is a separate ministry, the Ministry in Charge of Women and Families, and within the ministry, there is a division, the Directorate General on the Status of Women that provides funding for research and projects on women's affairs and problems. The Ministry is also responsible for establishing and running women's shelters. The Turkish state also signed major international documents and conventions on the elimination of discrimination against women such as the Beijing Declaration, Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The third wave of feminism in Turkey: the challenge of political Islam and Kurdish nationalism in the 1990s

The relationship between mainstream Turkish feminism and the state has gained multivariate facets with the rise of the Kurdish movement and Islamist politics since the 1990s. In the same years, the rise of identity politics was a concern for both Western feminism and feminism in Turkey. Similar to the black and lesbian feminists' challenge to the second wave of Western feminism for its white and heterosexual background, the Kurdish and Islamist feminists raised criticism against Turkish mainstream feminists for being ethno-centric and exclusionary of other identities. As discussed previously, the Kemalist Westernization project had its own concerns about women's status and visibility in society. In the 1990s, Kemalism's unitary and nationalistic provision for the organization of the state began to be challenged by Kurdish nationalism. At the same time, political Islam challenged Kemalist interpretation of secularism. With the rise of identity politics on the one hand and the rising criticism of Kemalism on the other, there emerged a polarization and fragmentation within Turkish feminism. In order to understand the points of divergence and the cleavages within the contemporary feminist movement in Turkey, one needs to take into account the contemporary dynamics of Turkish politics conveyed mainly by the Kurdish movement and the Islamic movement.

The predominance of the Kurdish question in Turkish politics dates back to 1984 with an attack that the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) launched on military installations in south-eastern Turkey. Although the PKK is regarded as a terrorist organization by the Turkish state and Turkey's allies, it is a well-known fact that the party had substantial support from the Kurdish population especially those in the eastern and south-eastern regions of Turkey. By the year 1990, the intensity of the conflict between the armed forces and the PKK had increased and there was a simultaneous rise in the number of civilian protestors on the streets protesting the government's policies. The armed forces evacuated certain villages (whose inhabitants were suspected of being associated with the PKK)

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[19] Ayşe G. Altınay and Yeşim Arat, *Türkiye'de Kadına Yönelik Şiddet*, Punto Baskı Çözümlemeleri, İstanbul, 2008, p. 21.

by purposely setting the villages on fire. According to some estimates, around 3000 villages were evacuated and around 3 million people migrated to the west of the country.[20] Although these deportations were taken to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in subsequent years and the Turkish state agreed to pay the villagers compensation, the forced migration caused further strain on the ethnic conflict as well as the relations between the Turkish state and citizens of Kurdish origin. Civilian political options for the resolution of the conflict have not always been available, as several of the political parties attracting Kurdish votes were closed down and the Kurdish political elite, including the members of parliament (MPs), have been arrested from time to time. The military option had always dominated the discourse and agenda in the Turkish state's treatment of its Kurdish population, which served as a major force behind the increasing politicization in the specified regions.[21] Accordingly, the Kurdish movement in Turkey grew over time.

It is in this context that a separate women's movement out of the Kurdish movement contending with the oppression that Kurdish women face has emerged. The central factor that united Kurdish women was the identity they shared, their 'Kurdishness'. Yet, although this politicization started with an emphasis on Kurdish ethnic identity, eventually women raised concerns that specifically deal with gender and women's issues. The influences of the Kurdish conflict on women were twofold. On the one hand, the environment of violence and insecurity increased the vulnerability of Kurdish women in the region; and on the other hand, it led to the politicization of Kurdish women, as these women became actively involved in political parties and organizations and participated in party meetings, demonstrations and protests, even sometimes ending up in prison. The women started to collectively voice their demands in the public sphere.[22] One example would be the Saturday Mothers united to raise public attention to people missing under police custody. They are the mothers who silently demonstrated every Saturday for 200 weeks at a crowded and touristy square in the city centre of Istanbul. The demonstrations were similar to the ones made by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo whose children were lost under the military dictatorship in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. Although the Turkish police initially took an accommodating attitude towards this silent demonstration of mothers, this changed in 1998. The police prevented the group from gathering at their usual meeting place and took some of them into custody. Eventually, the mothers had to end their silent protests.

Another example of a Kurdish women's organization is KAMER. It is one of the biggest feminist organizations, active in 23 different cities of the east and south-east regions of Turkey. The majority of its founders are Kurdish women who suffered from the prevalence of violence in the regions populated mostly by Kurds. These women, who developed an awareness of the difficulties that women have been experiencing in the violent environment related to the Kurdish conflict, soon realized that the place where most women experience violence was

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[20] Kemal Kirişçi and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict*, Frank Cass, London, 1997, pp. 128–131.

[21] Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 1998, p. 138.

[22] Nebahat Akkoç, Muhsin Bilal, Şehmuz Diken, Necdet İpekyüz and Selim Ölçer, 'Değişim ve Kürt sorunu', *Birikim Dergisi*, 184–185, August–September 2004, pp. 93–105.

actually their homes.[23] This was how KAMER started its struggle against violence in the family. Then KAMER expanded its goal in order to work towards changing those aspects of the culture and tradition that have negative effects on the well-being of women and children and to find ways to end such human rights violations. In addition to KAMER, there are other Kurdish women's groups and organizations such as DIKASUM, Kardelen, Selis and VAKAD which focus on the difficulties women face.

The Kurdish movement was organized as a political party to take part in parliamentary politics under different names since the early 1990s all of which were closed down by the Constitutional Court. Currently, the Democratic Society Party (DSP) is the party reflecting the Kurdish constituency and it has a group in the Turkish Parliament. The DSP has a very active women's branch and what's more the ratio of women to men MPs is the highest in the DSP compared to all other political parties in the country. In the last general elections in 2007, 50 women MPs took seats in the parliament out of a total of 550 MPs which makes for a ratio of 9 per cent women and 91 per cent men. However, out of 21 DSP MPs, eight of them are women, a ratio of 38 per cent women. The DSP organization also applies quotas to increase the political participation of women in the party ranks as well as in elections. It also holds a dual-presidency system based on gender; one of the party leaders is a man and the other is a woman. All of this shows the extent to which Kurdish women have been active in the movement and how the movement has embraced women.

The independent Kurdish women's movement in Turkey has brought up two substantial criticisms. One is against the patriarchal structure of Kurdish society and the status and treatment of women within this structure. Kurdish women were critical of the dominance of men within the Kurdish movement and argued that this was a consequence of the patriarchal culture in Kurdish society. The other criticism has been against Turkish feminism, which has ignored the Kurdish question and the problems of those women who lived in conflict zones populated mostly by Kurds. Turkish feminism, dominated by urban, Western, middle-class, ethnically Turkish and educated women was challenged by Kurdish women coming from more peripheral backgrounds with lower socio-economic status. It was Kurdish women who, for the first time, enlightened feminists of the 'Turkish' character of the feminist movement.[24] Hence, it was the Kurdish movement, more particularly the women of this movement, which pushed feminists to question how they relate to the state and to Kemalist ideology.

From the second half of the 1990s onwards, the interaction between Turkish and Kurdish feminists has increased. For example, since 1998, all women's organizations around the country that fight violence against women meet annually to discuss issues related to women's shelters and to formulate policy proposals. As Kurdish women's organizations have increased in number and influence, and as occasions for interaction between the two groups arose, the responses towards issues raised by Kurdish feminists have become diversified.

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[23] Nebahat Akkoç, 'KAMER'in feminizmi', <http://www.kamer.org.tr/eng/content.asp?c_id=278>, 2007.

[24] Aksu Bora, 'Feminizm: Sınırlar ve ihlal imkanı', *Birikim Dergisi*, 184–185, August–September 2004, pp. 106–112.

While some feminists have chosen to distance themselves from the state ideology, others have chosen to side with it. In fact, there are some feminist groups who hear the voices and criticisms of Kurdish women about the state's oppressive policies in the south-east. Feminist journals such as *Pazartesi* and *Amargi* are full of articles that reflect this viewpoint. However, there are also feminists who side with the status quo and nationalist solutions both to the woman and Kurdish questions. For example, Necla Arat, a prominent feminist academic who embraces Kemalist ideology, opened a case against another feminist Eren Keskin, because Keskin accused the security forces of raping women in the war-ridden south-east. For Arat, Keskin was a traitor who supported Kurdish terrorists against the interests of the Turkish state. As this example illustrates, the issue of ethnic identity and the way in which the Kemalist state has dealt with it, sit at the very heart of the feminist movement, creating points of divergence and cleavages in the feminist movements in Turkey.

Another challenge to mainstream feminism in Turkey has come from political Islam. Although both the Kurdish movement and political Islam have not been at ease with the Kemalist ideology—the Kurdish movement disputes the unitary characteristics of the Republic and the Islamist movement contests its interpretation of secularism—we should never fail to take into account an important point. While part of the Kurdish movement has been organized in tandem with the PKK, which is considered a terrorist organization by the Turkish state, political Islam in Turkey has remained within the confines of parliamentary politics and has been quite successful within the existing framework of competitive party politics.

Political Islam in Turkish politics dates its existence back to the late 1960s. Since then, almost all political parties with Islamist tendencies have been closed down by the Constitutional Court for violating the Republican principle of secularism. Currently there are two main parties from the conservative religious wing: the Felicity Party and the Justice and Development Party (JDP). The JDP, which has been successful in every local and national election since 2002, is the ruling party today. The party won 47 per cent of the votes in the 2007 general elections and 39 per cent of the votes in the 2009 local elections. It holds the majority of seats in the parliament and runs a majority of the municipalities throughout the country.

Islamists seemed to have adopted identity politics since the 1990s. They are religious and have simultaneously demanded a place in the public sphere with their Muslim identity, leading Islamic ways of life. New Islamist intellectuals have emerged along with a pro-Islamic bourgeoisie and, thereafter, new lifestyles and conduct in the public sphere have become noticeable, ones which are quite different from what the Kemalist project had envisioned. These intellectuals have criticized the Kemalist project and the path of Turkish modernization, which is said to be strictly secular and somewhat authoritarian. They published their critiques and wrote about their search for alternative ways of living and doing politics. A more modern and reformist outlook that demanded a West-friendly domestic and foreign policy, the adoption of a liberal economy in conformity with global trends and a more powerful Turkey in the Middle East and the Islamic world are the themes circulating in Islamist political platforms over the last two decades. These demands have been particularly formulated as the party programme of the JDP.

The Islamist movement in Turkey has served as a venue for the politicization of women in that women have actively taken part in the political parties of the religious conservative wing. Islamist women went to every house within a neighbourhood, distributed party propaganda in a friendly manner and created sympathy that turned into votes at the ballot boxes.[25] Even the current state minister for family and women's issues is a woman who was formerly the head of the women's branch of the JDP. The fight against the ban on wearing headscarves at universities has also increased women's political participation. Those who have refused to take off their headscarves have not been allowed entry to universities, causing obstacles with, and possibly the termination of, their education. Women from religiously conservative backgrounds have publicly protested this situation in the streets and at university campuses. Even some founded associations like AKDER to end discrimination against women who want to cover their hair.

There arose criticism by Islamist women against their male counterparts within the movement.[26] Although the headscarf ban is a woman's issue that has been on the Turkish political agenda for the last 15 years, it was mostly men who have discussed the issue. Islamist women accused the movement's men of not having taken the discussion on the ground of unjust and unequal treatment of women in Islam. Men argued that Islam treats women fairly and no further discussion on the woman question is necessary. Islamist women also have tried to show the hypocrisy of Islamist men when the latter were using computers at work, while they criticized the use of washing machines at home and when they used religious marriage ceremonies to legitimize keeping mistresses in their lives.[27]

Although the Islamist movement has been dominated by men, it is quite clear that the movement has bred a few feminists, a group of intellectuals and activists who dealt with the status of women in Islam extensively. The Islamist community has not come to regard these critical Islamist women as intellectuals, because that would grant a different role to women in the Islamic community, a role other than that of a wife or a mother. It would mean accepting that women can discuss and interpret the Koran and verses of the Prophet just as men do. It would mean that women's knowledge of religion can be respected and valued. This status is not something that Islamist men have been by and large willing to grant women.[28] Islamist women have generally discussed the issue of the status of women in Islam in women's magazines and have written about modernism, feminism, marriage and Islamic ways of life.[29] They have asked themselves whether women can attend collective prayers along with men. Moreover, they have discussed whether women can work as judges or prayer leaders or as the president of the state, for these jobs are reserved for men according to Islamic

[25] Ruşen Çakır, *Direniş ve İtaat: İki İktidar Arasında İslamcı Kadın*, Metis Yayınları, İstanbul, 2000.
[26] Cihan Aktaş, 'Kamusal alanda İslamcı kadın ve erkeklerin ilişkilerindeki değişim üzerine: Bacıdan bayana', *Birikim Dergisi*, 137, September 2000, pp. 36–47.
[27] Ruşen Çakır, 'Dindar kadının serüveni', *Birikim Dergisi*, 137, September 2000, pp. 27–35.
[28] Some of the Islamist women intellectuals are: Fatma Karabıyık Barbarosoğlu, Halime Toros, Sibel Erarslan and Emine Şenlikoğlu. İpek Mercil, 'İslamcı kadın aydınlar', *Tarih ve Toplum Dergisi*, 219, March 2002, pp. 61–65.
[29] Some examples of Islamist women magazines are *Kadın ve Aile*, *Mektup*, *Yeni Bizim Aile* and *Kadın Kimliği*.

traditions. Islamist intellectual women have opened up an important topic of debate: is religious feminism possible? It has been these Islamist women who have forced feminists to think about this question and it is their very existence and their struggle that has created cleavages within the feminist movement in Turkey.

The development of an Islamist feminism has urged other feminists to ask themselves and to take a position on the issue of whether a headscarf liberates women by allowing them to take part in public life, attend universities and find employment or whether it represents repression and the subservience of women, as has been the case so far in Islamic societies. The headscarf issue and the struggle of Islamist women have opened up another topic of debate; it has led feminists to question the path toward modernization that the Turkish state has chosen to follow. While some feminists have vehemently refused to grant a place to religious women in the official public sphere, some have looked more positively on the struggle of Islamist women to insist on their right to cover their heads. They have criticized the strictly secularist stance of the state that insists on keeping religious and traditional women out of universities and public offices. They have developed a critical approach to Kemalist ideology, which has insisted on defining freedom on its own terms, excluding women who want to be free to cover their heads because of their religious beliefs.

Contemporary trends in the third wave: globalization and the NGO-ization of Turkish feminism

Today we see that states are no longer alone in achieving development indicators related to women. Civil societal elements, specifically women's organizations, have started to take active roles in social development programmes. The number and influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has been increasing since the 1970s and these organizations differ significantly in size, in character and in their access to funds. Whereas some are organizations that work locally, some have relations and influence that reach beyond national borders. For example, some NGOs have so much influence that the World Bank consults with them on some of its initiatives. Moreover, some states have NGO members in their official delegations that prepare for UN conferences.

In line with this global trend, women's NGOs in Turkey have started to become more involved in development schemas and the provision of social services.[30] The main activities for women's empowerment include providing services to increase women's literacy, medical information as part of public health and population control programmes, development of women's skills and talents in order to increase their participation in the labour force and providing shelters and legal consultancy to battered women. The World Bank and the United Nations (UN), as well as related bodies like the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP) and Population Fund (UNFPA), provide funding to several women's organizations in Turkey. In consequence of the 'development from below' paradigm that has become dominant in the last

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[30] Yıldız Ecevit, 'Yerel yönetimler ve kadın örgütleri', in Aynur İlyasoğlu and Necla Akgökçe (eds), *Yerli Bir Feminizme Doğru*, Sel Yayıncılık, Istanbul, 2001, p. 228.

two decades, these international bodies prioritize cooperation with local bodies, launch joint programmes with NGOs and encourage civil societal involvement in the provision of social services such as enhancing women's rights and status.[31]

Turkey's acceptance as a candidate country to the EU has also affected the NGO-ization trend in Turkey. As part of monitoring Turkey's progress in fulfilling the membership criteria, the EU Commission has released annual reports all of which have recommended further development in human rights and the status of the women. The EU has set up an accession partnership and enabled Turkey to participate in EU programmes and agencies. Accordingly, Turkey became the recipient of coordinated pre-accession assistance. Since 1999, either through direct EU funds or indirectly through national funds, the EU accession process has been supporting developments in Turkish civil society.[32] With the legal liberalization through constitutional amendments, the number of NGOs increased to 76,000 in July 2007.[33] As part of this NGO-ization trend, women's non-governmental organizations have also become partners in funding schemas and have received substantial grants.

Globalization facilitated an internationalization of local feminist themes in Turkey. Domestic debates have arisen on honour killings, violence against women and ethnic conflict in the south-east region of Turkey; furthermore, the smuggling and trafficking of women (especially from former Soviet Union countries to Turkey), the headscarf issue and virginity tests have been adopted as major topics to be addressed by international organizations and global feminist activism. The ECHR has served as major grounds for the internationalization of local issues. For example, the notorious *Leyla Şahin v. Turkey* case[34] on the ban on wearing headscarves at Turkish universities provoked the domestic debate on the status of women, secularism and political Islam in Turkey once again. What's more, it opened up new points of discussion in the agenda of global feminism such as the status of Muslim migrant women in Europe, the possibilities for women's liberation in Islamic countries and the challenges that women face given recent cultural/religious revivalism. In 2009, the ECHR decided that the Turkish state should pay compensation to Nahide Oğuz, because the state failed to protect her from the violent acts of her husband. Some other examples of the spread of domestic issues to the international level are the *Ünal Tekeli v. Turkey* case[35] on the obligation of Turkish women to bear their husbands' name as the

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[31] Anke Draude, 'How to capture non-Western forms of governance: in favour of an equivalence functionalist observation of governance in areas of limited statehood', SFB-Governance Working Paper Series, No. 2, DFG Research Centre (SFB) 700, Berlin, January 2007.

[32] International Crisis Group, *Türkiye ve Avrupa: Geleceğe Doğru*, Avrupa Raporu No. 184, International Crisis Group Working to Prevent Conflict Worldwide, 17 August 2007.

[33] For further information on the figures of associations in Turkey, see < www.dernekler.gov.tr > .

[34] Leyla Şahin was a university student at the Faculty of Medicine at Istanbul University. She was not allowed to enter university courses for wearing a headscarf. She applied to the ECHR in 1998 claiming that her right to an education had been violated. In 2004, the Court decided that a student choosing a secular education at a state university would be expected to respect the rules of the university and hence its secular principles.

[35] According to Turkish Law, women, after marriage, must bear their husbands' surname. Ayten Ünal Tekeli sought to bear her maiden name alone as her last name and applied to the ECHR in 1998. In 2004, the Court decided that women being obliged to change their names when men were not was discrimination on the grounds of gender.

family name, and *Salmanoğlu and Polattas v. Turkey*[36] on sexual violence against women in custody. Additionally, violations of women's rights in Turkey have been addressed frequently by international human rights organizations.[37] Organizations such as International Amnesty, Human Rights Watch and Helsinki Citizens Assembly monitor various themes such as domestic violence, virginity testing, honour crimes and the status of refugees in Turkey.

The international community and the rising importance of NGOs have influenced politics as well as the activities of feminists in Turkey in various ways. We have seen various international organizations fund an increasing number of projects that aim to enhance women's rights and better their living conditions. It is in this context that the rise of project feminism can be observed in Turkey since the late 1990s. The following are a few examples: the Organization for the Support of Modern Life (*Çağdas Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği*) directs a project that gives study grants to support the education of girls from different age groups. Human Rights Education Program is another project that aims to train women to fully recognize and enjoy their human rights. Since 1998, this project has been working in collaboration with the Social Services and Child Protection Agency. The Domestic Violence Eradication Project is another project that aims to promote the strengthening of civil society in Eastern and Central Europe that is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. KAGIDER, receiving EU funds, directs a project that supports women entrepreneurs with the objective of increasing the participation of women in the economy.

The issue of 'NGO-ization of feminism' and the rise of 'project feminism' is being discussed internationally and leading to cleavages within feminism everywhere. On the one hand, these projects serve to empower some women through educational programmes. The number of organizations that are working to enhance women's rights and status has increased; more women work actively in civil society organizations and have become active participants in politics and decision-making processes. This puts pressure on states and forces them to formulate policies to protect women's rights and reduce discrimination against women. Thanks to this development taking place all around the globe we see piecemeal change towards enhancement of women's status in many countries.[38]

On the other hand, some feminists are highly critical of this emerging process of 'NGO-ization of feminism' or 'project feminism'. Some critiques focus on NGOs' staff, drawing attention to the fact that these organizations are not always run by people who feel responsibility to the common social good but by people motivated by profit.[39] Some others draw attention to the relationship between the UN and interests of capital. Some transnational companies attend UN conferences by identifying themselves as NGOs whereas they are in fact

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[36] Two girls, Nazime Ceren Salmanoğlu and Fatma Deniz Polattas, were arrested in March 1999 in the context of a police operation against the PKK (the Workers' Party of Kurdistan). Under custody, they were subjected to sexual violence and virginity testing.

[37] In Eren Keskin and Leman Yurtsever (eds), *Hepsi Gerçek: Devlet Kaynaklı Cinsel Şiddet*, Punto Baskı Çözümleri, Istanbul, 2006.

[38] Ann E. Cudd, 'Missionary positions', *Hypatia*, 20(4), 2005, pp. 164–182.

[39] Jael Silliman, 'Expanding civil society: shrinking political spaces—the case of women's nongovernmental organisations', *Social Politics*, 6(1), 1999, pp. 23–53.

business or industry advocacy organizations disguised as NGOs.[40] Another locus of critique is the partnerships between large corporate banks and NGOs that provide microenterprise lending through development fund projects.[41] Microcredit projects are criticized for bringing extra burden on women. Microcredits do not make women more independent, because they increase the dependency of their families to women; microcredits increase women's responsibilities.[42] Women now have to labour under the burden of their debts as well as their obligations at work and at home.

These international discussions have reflections in the Turkish case. There are voices against microcredit funding in the Turkish debate, too.[43] Some claim that the emergence of women entrepreneurs through projects that give women microcredits is very much part of the liberal project that cherishes individualism. In addition, the creation of women entrepreneurs may only lead to the emancipation of individual women, not of women as a social group; this would clearly contradict feminism's fundamental aim of liberating and emancipating all women and not any one particular woman. The feminist ideal was that women would work together collectively for this emancipation resisting hierarchical relationships and competitive structures of power. Feminists believed that women would work for a world without hierarchies and competition, a world that would do away with such patriarchal concepts. These feminists, seeing feminism as a social movement that aspires to radical change in existing patriarchal structures, believe that as women work in projects that are funded by organizations in which men are in the decision-making positions (such as the World Bank, UN or the EU), they move away from the world that feminists originally envisioned.

Another critique that feminists in Turkey have voiced is related to specialization in 'project feminism'. The writing and implementation of projects require a high level of cultural capital such as a command of foreign language(s), writing skills, access to new communication technologies and networks with international organizations that give funds.[44] This creates a division between women: there are highly skilled women who implement the projects and then there are those for whom the projects are implemented. Lower class women are only the objects of the projects whose subjects are determined and written by international organizations and middle-class women with a high level of cultural capital. These highly skilled women who are in positions to implement these projects to educate and make women employable through programmes intended to equip them with certain skills define women with inadequacy and insufficiency. Such an environment creates a hierarchical structure which divides women instead of uniting them. Hence, according to this critique, the whole project of 'project feminism' is against the spirit and principles of feminism. Women's problems are political problems, not social problems as the women

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[40] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1999, p. 384.

[41] Julia Elyachar, 'Best practices: research, finance, and NGOs in Cairo', *American Ethnologist*, 33(3), 2006, pp. 413–426.

[42] Gülnur Acar Savran, 'AB'nin toplumsal cinsiyet politikaları', *Birikim Dergisi*, 204, April 2006, pp. 40–54.

[43] Aslı Çoban, 'Feminizmden kadın hareketine ve STK'ya', *Amargi*, Fall 2007.

[44] Fatoş Hacıvelioğlu, 'Kadın kurtuluş hareketini sınırlayan bir dinamik: "Projecilik"', *Feminist Politika*, No. 1, Winter 2009.

projects aim to address.[45] Furthermore, the NGO projects conducted in Turkey generally target Kurdish women and aim to educate them on women's reproductive health and childcare; empower women through making them aware of their human rights; and emancipate them through equipping women with certain skills to increase their participation in the market economy. Multiplication of projects with such aims serves to reinforce the image of women as being powerless, whereas Kurdish women are quite far from being powerless and have learned quite well to express their politics.[46]

Conclusion

In this paper, we have illustrated how feminism in modern Turkey has evolved. We argue that the changes the movement has gone through have some parallels with the three waves of Western feminism. These changes have also been closely related to the political developments in the country as well as with globalization. We demonstrated that first wave feminism in Turkey had a concern for civic and political rights, a pool of demands that overlapped with the promises of the Kemalist reforms initiated in the early years of the Republic—the 1920s and 1930s. It wasn't until the 1980s that an independent women's movement arose wherein feminist activism flirted with radical feminist themes. This second wave was more of a critique of the patriarchal foundations of Turkish society. The third wave of feminism, which emerged in the 1990s is shaped mainly by the pressures of Kurdish nationalism and political Islam that are the two major forces in Turkish politics that challenge the status quo. The EU membership process since 2000 has also brought about new impetus to polity in Turkey especially regarding the development of civil society. Over the last couple of decades, there seems to be an NGO-ization of feminism, or what we call the rise of 'project feminism', developing hand in hand with globalization. And this has created a point of debate and cleavage within feminism in addition to the ones that emerged with the rise of Islamist politics and Kurdish nationalism.

   This historical and current assessment of the waves of feminism in Turkey has made three points indicative of certain trends and tendencies in the movement's development. The first point is that the critiques and demands that women activists have voiced have changed over time with each wave of feminism. In the first wave, the women of the time had an eye on legal and political equality between genders. In the environment of the 1920s and the 1930s, at a time when a modern state was institutionalized by civil and political rights which were constitutionally protected, feminists were suffragettes, similar to their counterparts in the West, who pushed for women's political participation. The second wave of feminism in Turkey contained a more intense 'gendered' worldview in comparison to the first wave. This 1980s feminism directly targeted patriarchy, criticized male hegemony, utilized a radical tone and demanded the development of women's status not only in the public sphere but in the private sphere as well. Third wave feminism, however, became identity oriented and had demands which were diversified, differentiated and fragmented in accordance

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[45] Aksu Bora, 'Projeler: Yeni bir bağlam, eski sorunlar', *Amargi*, Winter 2006.
[46] Nazan Üstündağ, 'Türkiye'de projecilik üzerine eleştirel bir değerlendirme', *Amargi*, Winter 2006.

with the ethnic, religious or sexual identity of the women who made these demands. Women's organizations becoming more professional is another characteristic of this last wave.

The second observation that we make is that the women's movement in Turkey has been greatly influenced by the political context. For instance, the 1920s movement was closely affiliated with Kemalist ideology and the reform process whereas the 1990s gave rise to criticisms directed against Kemalist ideology by Kurdish and Islamist groups. Our third observation is related to the change in the characteristics of the women involved in the movement. The history we have presented above shows that the feminist movement in Turkey started as a movement of elite women, but has turned into a mass movement and recruited relatively lower classes of women over time. The women in the 1920s who struggled for women's rights were from higher classes with high education levels. They were living in the urban areas of the country, predominantly in Istanbul and Izmir, and were coming mostly from notable families within Kemalist circles supporting modernization and Westernization. The second wave feminists also had urban backgrounds, but they had more professionals amongst them who had university educations, and they were already politicized by way of other ideological movements. They illustrated a more middle- and upper-middle-class outlook. The third wave of feminism in Turkey recruited women more from the periphery. Women from the far corners of the country—eastern and south-eastern women of Kurdish origin and traditional women politicized by way of Islamism wanted to get involved in gender politics. Over these different periods, it is clear that the political sphere of Turkey has been widened as Turkish feminisms have become more diversified.

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