

**Women living under muslim laws**  
**النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين**  
**Femmes sous lois musulmanes**

## **DOSSIER 5-6**

December 1988 – May 1989

### **Turkish Feminism: A Short History**

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#### **Introduction:**

In many ways, it is possible to say that feminism has erupted onto the Turkish political scene in the latter half of the 1980's. Since 1983, a number of publications and public meetings organised by feminists have already made an impact on political and intellectual circles in Istanbul and Ankara (cf. Tekeli 1986 and forthcoming). The general public heard of these women on two separate occasions. In March 1986, a group of women delivered a petition signed by 7000 women demanding the implementation of the United Nations Declaration of Women's Rights which Turkey has officially signed and which legally binds its signatories to accord citizens equal rights regardless of sex. This petition had been organised by a group of women who called themselves feminists and who belonged to a service and consultancy company, The Women's Circle, whose brief was to "evaluate the work of women, paid or unpaid, outside or within the home." It was really in 1987 that feminists literally took to the streets. In May of that year 3000 women marched in Istanbul to protest against the physical abuse of women and in particular the battering of women. In June, a group of feminists in Ankara joined forces with environmentalist groups to campaign against the Ankara municipality's plans to convert a park in the centre of town into a multi-story car-park. In October of the same year, a one-day festival in Istanbul was organised to rally support and raise funds towards setting up refuges for battered women. The following month, feminists set up their own stand (which they called the Temporary Modern Women's Museum) in an Istanbul book fair, during which they displayed artefacts ranging from kitchen utensils to IUD's that women are confronted with in their daily lives.

These activities were accompanied by other forms of public action that by their very nature had less impact compared to those described above. Various publications including magazines, literary novels, and pamphlets became available in bookshops. One such novel which was later made into a film sold more than 60,000 copies before the official censors, the State Committee for the Protection of Juveniles from Amoral Publications, banned its distribution. Writings by European feminists such as J. Mitchell, A. Michel, L. Segal and A. Oakley, as well as Egyptian writer Saadawi were translated into Turkish. Public conferences and discussion panels denouncing the abuse of women in the home, in media images, and in legal stature were held, and women's associations such as Istanbul-based Association for Women's Solidarity were set up. These activities took place in the intellectual circles of Istanbul and Ankara and drew the attention of people who were already involved in politics. In a country where the vast majority of the population does not have the habit of reading as a leisure activity, feminist publications had a limited impact even in the big cities.

The aim of this paper is to try to identify if possible something called 'Turkish feminism'. I say "if possible" because at present it still is very difficult to talk about a specifically Turkish feminism. The very nature of feminism itself poses an important problem for women who attempt to question their conditions of existence when the latter are shaped by cultural and social forces that are not

explicitly Western. Black women in Britain as well as the United States have already voiced their dissatisfaction with what Amos and Parmar (1984) have called 'imperial feminism'. These women have challenged the ethnocentric conceptions of the family and sexuality with which white women have worked to create a universalistic feminism. The shortcomings of Western feminism with regard to women in the Middle East have also been voiced by Kandiyoti (1987) and Lazreg (1988). The difficulty of delimiting a specifically Turkish feminism is compounded by the fact that Turkish feminists themselves at the moment seem to take over concepts from Western feminism without subjecting them to serious questioning. Finally, if it is possible to argue that Turkish feminism was born in 1982, then obviously, this is too short a period of time for the movement to have attained a coherent stand or stands. Optimists have argued that feminism is still in its infancy in Turkey (Tekeli op. cit.); more pessimistic observers might say that the movement was stillborn. The latter viewpoint seems to inform Kandiyoti's conclusion in her recent (1988) paper analysing what she calls the 'woman question' in Turkey.

In this paper I shall try to investigate the political space within which these activities are inscribed and to explore the extent to which this space shapes the nature of these women's demands. In the modern Turkish context, feminism appears firstly as an ideology that attempts to articulate the position of women in society as a central political issue. In this respect, it has had to carve a space for itself by engaging in debates with two other ideologies that attempt to capture the same political space: left-wing ideologies propounding a class-based political struggle and Islamic discourses. Both Islam and the left in Turkey today have their own recipes for the 'liberation of women from capitalist oppression'. The various political forces that are informed by these ideologies make up the non-parliamentary opposition. It is through an examination of the different considerations, social, political, as well as cultural, that led to the formulation of these demands, that the conditions of existence of Turkish feminism can be delimited.

One of the means through which I shall attempt to understand the nature of the feminist movement in Turkey then, is by trying to explain the implications of the positioning of the women's movement in the ranks of the non-parliamentary opposition. What are the reasons that account for this positioning and how do Islamic and leftist discourses which share the same political space shape the content and demands of the Turkish feminists? Rather than rely on some universalistic attribute of feminism, (for example attributes that it might have as a new social movement), I will try to answer the question in a more historical manner; that is I will try to look for these answers in the political role that women have played in Turkey.

Debates regarding the position of women in Turkish society have occupied a central place in the political and ideological agendas of the Ottoman and Turkish states at three crucial moments. The first was during the period of Ottoman reforms instituted through the activities of the young Turks in the middle of the nineteenth century. At this juncture it was reformist men, whose main concern was to find ways of reviving a floundering empire, who voiced concern about the position of women in society. A second wave of debates defining the role of women and, by extension the meaning of womanhood took place in the early years of the establishment of the Turkish Republic and culminated in the enfranchisement of Turkish women in 1934. Although elite women were more vociferous in stating their own positions during this second phase, the first and the second wave of debates on the 'woman question' culminated in what various observers have called 'state feminism' (Tekeli 1986; 185; Kandiyoti, personal communication). The third time that feminism and women have occupied an important space in the public gaze in Turkey was after the military coup of 1980. As summarized in the introductory comments of this paper, this movement differs considerably from the other two in that the main actors seem to be women. The fact that this movement has largely developed in opposition to 'state feminism' explains to a certain extent its place among the forces of the non-formal opposition. The last part of this paper will try to elucidate the political demands articulated by these women and define those parameters that may constitute Turkish feminism.

## **1. The Ottoman Period.**

At the turn of the nineteenth century, concern regarding the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire led to the formulation of various projects that hoped to reverse what seemed to be an inevitable

process. One of these projects, that of 'modernisation', became the dominant discourse to which other sections of the population, especially the Islamic intelligentsia, felt they had to respond.

From 1839 to 1876, far-reaching reforms were undertaken by the Ottoman bureaucrats in the fields of administration, legislation and education. These reforms were implemented in an atmosphere where the reasons for the decline of the Ottoman Empire were intensely debated. Bureaucrats as well as young thinkers educated in Europe had begun debating the meaning of the French revolution and the new ideas emanating from it.

Freedom, equality and the notion of citizenship were among these ideas. As shown by various historians dealing with this period, these debates created a cleavage between the Western-looking bureaucratic elite and the relatively illiterate popular classes, whose way of life was becoming increasingly threatened by the new mode of social regulation imposed upon them. Thus, while the former stressed that progress was not simply a matter of technology but also of a rationalistic, positivistic world-view such as existed in the West, the latter increasingly took refuge in Islamic precepts, arguing that the decline experienced by the Ottoman Empire was caused by the materialistic values of the West and the abandonment of the Islamic way of life. These debates crystallised in two opposing ideologies, one stressing Westernisation, progress and enlightenment, the other emphasising Islam and tradition.

As Kandiyoti's (forthcoming) insightful analysis of this period shows, the position of women in the Ottoman polity was constituted as an ideological terrain upon which these two opposing viewpoints fought out their conflicts. The progressivists argued that the emancipation of women was a prerequisite of civilisation. Women as mothers and wives were responsible for the well-being of the Ottoman man and for the creation of future enlightened generations. To create responsible citizens, it was necessary first to educate and enlighten the women who were the mothers of the modern citizens of the Ottoman Empire. Women imprisoned in the shackles of tradition and superstition could not fulfil this role. Traditional arranged marriages, divorce laws leading to the easy repudiation of wives, polygamy and the segregation of the sexes were seen as constituting the major obstacles preventing the education and liberation of women (Tekeli 1982: 196-199). By contrast Islamists argued that the Koran provided a readily available blue-print according to which social life was to be organised, and that any deviation from these regulations would lead to corruption and moral depravation.

It was in this climate of opinion that the scattered voices of women themselves began to be heard in newspapers and journals of the period. One woman writing in *Yerakki*, (*Progress*, a political journal devoting a special page to women), in 1868 deplores the idleness of relatively wealthy urban ladies and suggests that the education of women would help transform them into useful human beings. It is easy to recognize here traces of arguments put forward by Wollstonecraft in Britain in the previous century.

But other more specifically Ottoman arguments were also advanced. In view of the dominant position of an Islamic discourse whereby any attempt to criticize veiling, segregation or polygamy was immediately branded as a sacrilege, and in conjunction with the various attacks suffered by women who appeared in public (albeit in a covered buggy) in the company of their husbands, a moderate Islamic approach to the position of women gained prominence. The main proponent of this moderate view was Fatma Aliye Hanim, who even wrote a polemical essay against the view put forward by a young *ulema* that polygamy was sanctioned by Qur'anic law. By contrast, Fatma Aliye argued that polygamy was an Arab custom that had been adopted in the course of the centuries.

To prove her point, she gave extensive references to the life of the prophet and to the exalted position of the women of his time. It is interesting that these same arguments are now being put forward by contemporary Islamist young women as I shall show below.

Other, more insistent voices began to be heard after the institution of the Second Constitutional period (1908-1919) ushered in by the Young Turk Revolution. This revolution put the Committee for Union and Progress into power after the overthrow of the Abdulhamit and his absolutist rule.

In the new atmosphere of freedom, a number of exclusively women's organizations were formed and new women's journals began to appear. Although many of these associations were charity organisations and although the journals carried articles mainly on homemaking, fashions and health, there were a few among them that were more overtly political. The women who were writing in these journals were organising around a number of issues. A prominent theme in their articles was their disappointment with the new era of 'freedom'. Freedom, they argued, turned out to be only freedom for men; the reformists forgot about the emancipation of women once they obtained state power. This assessment led some of these articulate women to argue that it would only be women who could liberate the women of the Ottoman Empire.

Again, however, the liberation of women is used synonymously with progress and is linked closely to education. Emine Sniye, Fatma Aliye's sister argues in 1910 that progress can only be obtained through the education of women and that it is up to women to undertake women's education (*Terakkiyat-i nisvaniyye'yi kimoen bekleyelim?*). A woman (Ismet Hakki) writing in *Mehasin* (Things Beautiful) in 1909 takes the argument even further by stating that rights can only be obtained by fighting (*Carpismak Intiyari*), and that it would be easier to safeguard rights for which a struggle had been waged.

Kandiyoti argues that it is best to characterize the second decade of the twentieth century as a period when the search for a national bourgeoisie intensified and when women were being incorporated into public life according to their social class. Thus, various vocational schools, secondary schools, as well as a Women's University were established to train well-to-do urban women as schoolteachers and nurses. In a few years' time when the Balkan war and the First World war broke out, these women actively participated in the war effort by raising funds, organising supplies, tending the wounded and so on. The educational reforms of the Tanzimat did not only create the educated bourgeois woman. Elementary education in the Islamic schools and the widespread apprenticeship system that taught these women basic household skills laid the basis for the creation of a female proletariat (Isin 1988). These women were recruited as workers in textile as well as ammunition factories (Guzel 1985: 869-872).

In Istanbul at least, the increased participation of women in work outside the home created problems for Islamic ideals of segregation. In 1916, the Islamic Organisation for the Employment of Women was founded with the expressed aim of teaching women to earn their living by working 'honourably'. This organisation provided women with room and board and allowed them to live a secluded life by taking upon itself the transportation of the resident women to and from work (Toprak 1988; 34). Furthermore, according to Toprak, the organisation was also promoting marriage by providing girls with a trousseau and financial support. Marriage was made mandatory for women over 20 and men over 25, and any resident not complying with this stipulation was asked to leave.

As this final example also shows, right before the demise of the Ottoman Empire, women were regarded by themselves and by the state firstly as mothers and wives. Although educated women had begun to speak out against the Ottoman family system, the main discourse was one of progress and education that did not challenge the identity of women as wives and mothers. This discourse was formulated in opposition to and at times in compliance with another, dominant discourse that couched its arguments in Islamic terms.

### **The Early Republican Period**

It was in the process of the Republican reforms that the second wave of debates on the position of women occupied public interest. If the Ottoman debates constituted women primarily as wives and mothers in need of education, the second constituted them as patriotic citizens. The new patriotic woman was still a wife and a mother, but she also had another mission, that of educating the nation. Professional women became an important symbol for the Turkish Republic, and teaching was exalted above all else. Within this discourse, women were linked to democracy, rather than civilisation, and the debates proceeded in the context of sustained attacks by the founders of the young republic on the Islamic way of life.

It was the activities of women during the war of independence that were to have an important effect on this new identity conferred on women (Tekeli 1982, Kandiyoti forthcoming). While the peasant women had been mobilised behind the lines, the educated women of Istanbul had been active in delivering patriotic speeches in Istanbul and other parts of the country. Women had vigorously protested the partition of the Empire and had joined the Society for the Defense of the Nation (Tekeli 1982). But once the war was over, women returned home to resume their roles as mothers and wives (Tekeli 1986).

As the leaders of the nation were trying to create a Turkish as opposed to an Ottoman identity, they had to contend with the power of Islam.

Different currents of Turkism that were articulated since the turn of the century were influential in shaping the version of Turkish nationalism gradually developed by Mustafa Kemal and his friends, the rulers of the young republic. The development of a Turkish nation had to be subordinated to other, perhaps more powerful identities. The Turkish identity, as developed by various thinkers of the period, incorporated the notion of an essentially egalitarian and democratic Turkish past that also included the

image of an equal and powerful women, what Kandiyoti calls a 'pre- Islamic golden age for women'. But ideas of progress, modernisation, technological improvement were also part and parcel of the new nationalism.

The reforms introduced by the ruling elite of the young republic look very much as though they were directed at undermining the bases of the Islamic way of life. In 1924, the caliphate was abolished and with it went office of the Seyh-ül-Islam and the Ministry of the Seriat, the other linchpins of the hierarchical religious structure (Lewis 1968; 265). The closure of courts that passed judgements according to the Seriat and of the separate religious and theological colleges accompanied these initial measures. In 1925 Atatürk launched what Lewis calls his 'great symbolic revolution', that is he abolished the fez and made the wearing of hats by all men a legal requirement. The hat was the symbol of Western civilisation and of progress; it constituted and was perceived as the greatest threat to the Muslim identity of the masses (Lewis 1968; 269). The official adoption of the Georgian calendar (1925), the Swiss civil code (in 1926), and of the Latin script (1928) were among other reforms that made it difficult to continue daily life according to the old standards and regulations.

Although the Swiss civil code allowed women many rights that they had demanded during the Ottoman era, such as the abolition of polygamy and repudiation, laws regulating the dress of women were not passed until 1935. As argued by Seni (1984), women's bodies have been used as vehicles for the symbolic representation of political intent. In her analysis of village ideology in present-day Turkey Delaney (1984) also shows how the female body becomes an icon encapsulating the past and the future (the seed of the man) and symbolising his house, village, and nation. In spite of numerous incursions into the family life of the Muslim, the republicans seem not to have been so eager to declare their successes at the level of the symbolic. The new woman was to take her place in the public life of the republic as an educated social woman. There would be no difference between men and women, for whom the values and techniques of the nation would be paramount (Durakbasi 1988). (Male) writers declared that notions of maleness and femaleness were not issues that the new nation had to deal with, since these were 'private' issues that were under the jurisdiction of the individual man.

Nevertheless, the values of motherhood were still an important aspect of womanhood. As described in numerous newspapers, pamphlets, treatises and novels published in the first decade of the Republic, the new Turkish woman would continue to have children and to be a wife because it was her duty to the nation. The new woman was a thrifty, enlightened, professionally trained housewife who, cognisant of the needs of the republic only used consumer goods produced in Turkey and who experienced heterosexual friendship only with her husband (Köker 1988:108). Moreover, the new woman was not to be the 'over-Westernised *mondaine*', but would be honourable and chaste like her predecessor in the mythic Turkish past.

Kandiyoti depicts the dominant female image of the period as 'the comrade- woman, an asexual

sister-in-arms', whose honour and chastity remains intact in spite of her active participation in the struggle to liberate and improve her nation. This image leads her to conclude that nationalist and Islamic discourses concur in establishing a definition of woman congruent with the true identity of the collectivity, one in which the sexuality of women is kept under strict control. Kandiyotı further concludes that the political process started by the Tanzimat reforms of 1837 gave rise to discourses constitutive of the Ottoman-Turkish polity, discourses within which women figured as symbolic pawns.

Tekeli's (1979) argument that the enfranchisement of women in 1934 was a means of proving the democratic nature of the Turkish Republic ruled by a single party is largely supportive of Kandiyotı's argument. At a time when fascist dictatorships were gaining ground in Europe, the enfranchisement of Turkish women may very well have been a symbolic assertion of democracy. As I argued above, the linking of women and democracy was also part of the struggle against Islamic forces, a struggle in which images of an essentially democratic and feminist Turkish past were frequently made use of.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to indicate that a handful of women, especially between 1926 and 1934 did fight to obtain the vote. These women established the Turkish Women's Federation, which during the 1927 national elections tried to show its own candidates; the women were dissuaded from doing so by Atatürk himself (Köker 1988; 84). Pressures from above had already managed to thwart women's attempts to establish a political party in 1923 (Toprak 1988). The attempts by the federation to obtain political rights attracted considerable criticism in the press and led to the deposition of the incumbent leader of the federation. Under the new leadership, the federation declared itself to be primarily involved in charitable and cultural activities (Köker 1988; 84).

Nevertheless, during the municipal elections of 1931 the Federation did name its own women candidates, and they drew up a comprehensive manifesto in support of their cause. This manifesto, among other things, promised the free distribution of milk to nursing mothers by the municipalities.

Populism (*nalkgılık*) was one of the main ideological tenets of the single party of the nineteen thirties and forties. This populism, according to the ideologues of Kemalism also included feminism, or in a literal translation of the Turkish word, 'womanism' (*kadincılık*) (Köker 1988; 106). The official ideology proclaimed the equality of Turkish men and women. This state-proclaimed gender equality produced many professional and academic women in Turkey for whom feminism was redundant since its aims had already been accomplished by Kemalism. Over the years, these women organised in a number of associations that proclaimed the primacy of the values of the Republic, education and motherhood. This double role that was prescribed for women still informs the world-view of many contemporary academic women, the very people who were able to take advantage of republican reforms (Köker 1988). For these women Islam constitutes the main threat to their existence. When religious students agitated for the right to wear a headscarf in the university, the very institution that was the culmination of the Kemalist ideal, women belonging to these organisations staged a symbolic march to Atatürk's Mausoleum in Ankara and laid a wreath at his grave. Articles appeared by academic women in newspapers asking women to fight what was perceived as a retreat to Islam, a retreat that would primarily affect women's position in society (Abadan-Unat 1987). In other words, for the women who were the direct descendants of Kemalist reforms, Islam and tradition continued to be the main threat to their conditions of existence. By contrast, secularism, enshrined in the ideals of Kemalism was perceived as their only protection.

The opposition between modernisation-Westernisation on the one hand and traditionalism and Islam on the other has been shown to inform the lives of many sections of the Turkish population. Tapper (forthcoming) describing different forms of wedding ceremonies in a central Anatolian town in the 1980s reports that townspeople themselves categorise wedding rituals under the headings 'modern' versus 'traditional' in spite of the fact that the variety of weddings observed in the field precludes such easy categorisation. Similarly, a small village near Ankara is divided into two wards on the basis of whether the daughters of their inhabitants go to school or not (Delaney

1984). Delaney in a marvellously constructed argument shows how school for daughters mean uncovering the head, that is opening to outside influence, both morally and intellectually. The two main forces that shape the village world-view according to Delaney are Islam, the old ways, and Westernism in the guise of Kemalist reforms and enshrined in the very structure of the school. The links between education, women and religion that I have tried to describe in this historical account, appear in Delaney's work as active forces engaged in full-scale battle.

### **3. The 1980's**

During the sixties and seventies Turkish women began to be drawn into a rather different form of discourse from the one that had constituted their mothers as women. The student movement and the various brands of the Marxist left dominated youth politics for over two decades. Thus, although state ideology continued to provide a legitimate space for women's social and political activities, a new, by definition anti-state ideology was gradually gaining ground. The humanitarian and egalitarian discourse on which most leftist ideologies depended offered women a place in the fight against class domination. But the fight was strictly against the class system and any other ideology such as women's rights had to be subordinated to the main goal. Tekeli, describing these organisations, asserts that the image of the self-sacrificing wife-mother-sister defined the attitude of most of these organisations to women (1986; 195). An anti-Islamic stance and the importance given to progress and to education constitute the main points of similarity between ideas informing these movements and official state ideology. What these movements did for women was to give them the experience of mobilisation against the state.

The reasons why the woman question, let alone feminism, did not emerge as an important point of focus before the 1980s can and has been linked to the domination of left-wing ideology in anti-state circles. Other reasons no doubt can also be discerned. Instead of debating this issue, I would like firstly to describe the demands of the feminist movement as it developed after 1980 and to show how it articulates with leftist and Islamist ideologies prevalent today.

Women who call themselves feminists are organised in various small groups. As a result of restrictions imposed by post-1980 state regulation, one of these groups is organised as a limited company that publishes a journal called *Feminist* (Tekeli 1986 and forthcoming), while others established after 1985 are formed as legally constituted associations. The group that I am involved in rejects all forms of formal organisation and until May of this year was involved in running a woman's coffee shop in Ankara that served as a meeting place for a small number of women. The different activities that have been undertaken by these groups have already been described in the opening paragraphs of this paper. Through these activities and through various publications, these women raise the issue of the oppression of women as a major area of struggle in contemporary Turkish society. Although these women speak from rather different positions, they all agree on the need for an independent women's movement, and they all accept and actively support the proliferation of women's groups representing a wide variety of ideological positions.

Up to the present, the Campaign Against the Battering of Women has served as a focus point around which all these different groups have rallied and co-operated. A booklet produced jointly by the different groups participating in the campaign and entitled *Shout and Be Heard* is a collection of the experiences of battered women. The booklet argues that the violence against women is part and parcel of male domination and that it is endorsed by the state. Furthermore, it forcefully demonstrates that violence against women is not confined to any particular section of the population, conceived in terms of class, education, or occupational background. Above all, the pamphlet tries to isolate the family as the major site of violence against women and argues that women within the family are seen as the property of the men that are its legal heads. Women in Turkey suffer from violence primarily from men who are their husbands, their fathers and brothers.

Western feminism has had a significant impact on these various groups. Non-hierarchical and independent forms of organisations, consciousness-raising groups, issue-oriented ad hoc committees are clearly reminiscent of the Western experience. Moreover, most of the women in these groups (including myself), or at least those who were the more active organisers, had had

first hand experience of life in the West and had, as students, been associated with feminist activities in London or Paris. However, the need for autonomy and small non-official forms of organisation can also be seen as conditions dictated by the political space that these women wanted to create for themselves. Firstly, ad hoc organisations were instrumental at a time when state repression discouraged all forms of extra-parliamentary political activity. This also helped women who had been involved in leftwing activism prior to 1980 to organise independently of the ideological pressure coming from the more-orthodox left which branded their efforts as bourgeois deviations. As suggested by the foregoing, the refusal of many of these women to organise in legally recognised political associations was also a way of distancing themselves from the state and of repudiating state feminism.

The insistence on the political nature of the personal is another point of similarity between Western and Turkish feminism. This insistence has led feminists to consider the specificity of the Turkish family and its relation to the subordination of women. The examination of the family and especially of the relations between women within the family have also revealed strong networks established by women that could be and were activated to create co-operative and supportive structures. The concept of sisterhood which Western feminists tried to promote was seen to already exist in a society that is still largely segregated along gender lines. (Of course, there are limits to this solidarity, as is evidenced by the testimonies of women recounting the role played by other women, especially mothers-in-laws, in their experience of male violence). Considerations such as these made feminists sensitive to what they began to call 'women's knowledge' (Tekeli 1987, Ovadia 1988).

Apart from these points that bring the different women's groups together, there are also important influences that pull them apart. The divisions that marked the left still play an important role in the constitution of the different women's groups. The emergence of the feminist discourse in the early 1980s was in fact seen by many sections of the left as a piece of opportunism, a voicing of opinion when other more 'seriously political' voices had been forcefully silenced. During the course of the seventies, some leftist groups changed their attitude with regard to women's independent organisation and instead began to promote such activities as a way of drawing more support to their more-inclusive projects. Many of the women active in women groups identify themselves also as socialists and as such are quite sensitive to criticisms from the left. One consequence of what in Turkey are largely perceived as conflicting allegiances has been the formulation of specifically Turkish 'socialist feminism' where the struggle within society at large is described within the terms of class struggle and the struggle within the family is seen as the locus of feminist activity (Kaktüs 1988). Thus, one question that cannot be answered at the moment is whether allegiance with the left as opposed to the state will allow these feminist groups a longer lease of life.

Apart from the left, projects that speak to women are developed both by the official establishment and by the new Islamic movements that have become prominent in the last few years. The activities of the Foundation for the Elevation of the Turkish woman, an organisation headed by the Prime Minister's wife is able to channel considerable funds into its main activities; the campaign to marry legally women who are joined only by the unofficial religious ceremony and the campaign to bring health visitors and means of birth control to rural women. A bi-monthly newssheet published by the Foundation informs its reader of these activities and praises women who have successfully combined marriage and motherhood with a professional career. In its insistence on the false security provided by the religious ceremony, and on the role of women as mothers and as career women, the project of the Foundation seems to be fairly in line with tenets of Kemalist feminism. The Foundation also promotes the Motherland Party and as such acts as the Ministry of Women's Affairs advocated by the Social Democratic Populist Party, heir of Atatürk's People's Republican Party.

Islamic publications that have proliferated in the last three years also speak to the woman's question and in the view of one analyst, raise the banner of women's rights and women's emancipation in their attack on secularism and modernity (Acar 1988)?. That men and women are equal in the sight of God, and that only Islam can restore women the rights they have lost is a constant theme expounded in these publications. The ways in which the Islamic discourse intersects with that of the feminists can be shown by two recent developments. Articles written by



a few women Islamists became the centre of a controversy that raged in the pages of an Islamic daily which had an intellectual readership and was also involved with issues such as environmental pollution and student demands. A woman who identified herself as a Muslim proclaimed that Islam could benefit from the arguments put forward by feminism. The feminist author that these women whom the popular press calls 'turbaned feminists' most frequently quote is el-Saadawi. This initial article provoked a variety of responses from readers. Many of the women who responded repudiated feminism as a product of Westernisation and modernisation which had nothing to offer to a true Muslim; but they nevertheless accepted that the position of women is something that Islamic writers and intellectuals had not been very sensitive about. Muslim women are attracted to feminism to the extent that the latter questions the objectification of women and the commoditisation of the female body and sexuality.

The aggressiveness of the Turkish male and the physical harassment that women were subjected to in overcrowded public buses made another Islamic journal launch a campaign for segregating public transport. The fact that some feminists publicly embraced these women created a serious rift among feminists. For some, joining forces with Islamists was compatible with feminism which in the name of democracy supported the expression of any political demand. Furthermore, the analysis on which these debates were based, up to point, concurred with the feminist analysis. Thus, there should be no problem in joining forces with Islamist women against male society as well as its state apparatus. Other women, by contrast felt that this was carrying anti-statism too far and that feminism and Islam could not ever be compatible.

As these last examples show, the twin parameters of state secularism and modernism as opposed to an Islam that is now trying to shed its traditionalism and develop a radical discourse, still define the space within which feminism is trying to flourish. To the extent that the left has provided another discourse shaping the terrain within which feminism develops, it occupies a middle position. Like the Islamists and the feminists, left discourses are located outside the structures of the state and outside Western capitalism, but like state ideology, it propounds a modernist, secular world view in which there is no space for religion. Whether feminism, trapped as it were between modernism and non-modernism, will be able to survive in these conditions and what forms it will take in the process of survival are still questions that only the future can answer.

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