

CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S MOVEMENT  
IN TURKEY:  
PRODUCTION OF DIFFERENT KNOWLEDGES

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## Thesis Abstract

Dilşah Şaylan, “Contemporary Women’s Movement in Turkey: Production of Different Knowledges”

This thesis attempts to understand how experiences of women from diverse backgrounds and politicization processes shape the articulations of their positions on gender issues and constitute differences and similarities with other positions in the context of women’s movement. For this aim, women activists in Turkey have been asked their decisions about the issues of family, sexual violence and headscarf that have been mainly problematized and politicized by different women movements all across the world. In order to get the opinions of the interviewees on family they were asked about the Prime Minister Erdoğan’s call to give birth at least three children to Turkish women in a meeting that is arranged to celebrate World Women’s Day. Secondly in order to obtain the viewpoints of women with regards to sexual violence the sexual harassment of a girl by a publicly known Islamist journalist Hüseyin Üzmez and the rape cases attempted against children and women by a state opera artist Şahin Öğüt were opened to discussion. Lastly as a deep seated problem having been instrumentalized by various political forces in Turkey quite a long time headscarf issue was discussed over the proclamation published by AK-DER, known as an Islamist woman organization, under the title “February 28 Should Not Last 1000 Years” by making a call for the removal of headscarf bans. Concerning these issue areas situated at the intersection of diverse political struggles specific experiences and knowledges of women coming from Islamist, Kurdish, Kemalist and feminist backgrounds are found out influential in articulating their positions as a result of the interviews. This supports the argument that there is not a separate, abstract and clearly demarcated identity as ‘woman’ but it is spontaneously experienced along with other social attributes such as religion, ethnicity and ideology by women. Rejection of the possibility of such an isolated woman identity encouraged the author to criticize the exclusionary stance assumed by some feminists from time to time on the grounds of their own constructions of womanhood and feminism. Giving an idea about how differences are experienced within the women’s movement in Turkey, the thesis finalizes its argument by making a call to embrace different production of knowledges by women and view them legitimate which would enhance the possibilities to do politics together between women in the context of women’s movement.

## Tez Özeti

Dilşah Şaylan, “Türkiye Son Dönem Kadın Hareketi: Farklı Bilgi Üretimleri”

Bu tezde Türkiye kadın hareketi içinde mücadele vermekte olan kadınların farklı geçmişlerden ve politize olma süreçlerinden geçerek edindikleri deneyimler üzerinden toplumsal cinsiyet meselelerine karşı konumlarını nasıl artiküle ettikleri ve konumlarının arasında ne tür benzerlikler ve farklılıklar olduğu anlaşılmasına çalışılmıştır. Bu çaba doğrultusunda kadın aktivistlere, tüm dünyada farklı kadın hareketlerinin çıkışlarından bu yana politize edip sorunsallaştırdıkları alanlar olan aile, cinsel şiddet ve başörtüsüyle ilgili sorular yöneltilmiştir. Bu tercihe uygun olarak görüşmecilerin aile üzerine düşünceleri Başbakan Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’ın daha önce kadınlar günü kapsamında düzenlenmiş bir toplantıda Türk kadınlarına yaptığı, ve daha sonra birçok ortamda da dile getirdiği 3 çocuk çağrısı üzerine fikirleri sorularak anlaşılmasına çalışılmıştır. Kadınların cinsel şiddete bakış açıları ise İslamcı camiada tanınan bir isim olan Vakit Gazetesi yazarı Hüseyin Üzmez’in 14 yaşındaki bir kız çocuğunu taciz etme ve bir devlet opera sanatçısı olan Şahin Öğüt’ün kız çocuklarına ve kadınlara tecavüz etme vakalarına karşı kurdukları pozisyonlar üzerinden anlaşılmasına çalışılmıştır. Son olarak oldukça geniş bir zaman dilimine yayılmış ve birçok politika tarafından araçsallaştırılmış bir mesele olarak başörtüsü sorunu İslamcı bir kadın örgütü olarak bilinen AK-DER tarafından yayınlanan ve başörtüsü yasaklarının kaldırılmasının talep edildiği, geniş bir kesimden destek bulmuş ‘28 Şubat Bin Yıl Süremez’ bildirisi üzerinden tartışmaya açılmıştır. Başka politikalarla iç içe geçmiş bu meselelerde İslamcı, Kürt, Kemalist çevrelerden gelen kadınların deneyimlerinin, ve bu deneyimler sonucu inşa ettikleri bilgilerin pozisyonlarını belirlemede etkili olduğu görülmüştür. Bu da kadınlığın din, etnisite, ideoloji gibi öğelerle iç içe geçmiş olarak yaşandığını ve kadın gibi ayrı, soyut, sınırları önceden belirlenmiş bir kimlik olmadığını göstermektedir. Böyle bir kadın kimliği varsayımını baştan reddederek kadın hareketi içinde yer alan bazı feministlerin kendi oluşturdukları kadınlık ve feminizm anlayışları üzerinden zaman zaman geliştirdikleri diğer kadınları dışlayıcı tutum eleştirilmiştir. Kadın hareketi içinde farklılıkların nasıl deneyimlendiğine dair bir fikir veren bu çalışma farklı bilgi üretimlerinin de yer bulduğu ve dikkate alındığı bir kadın hareketinde beraber politika yapma imkanlarının daha çok geliştirebileceği argümanı ile bitirilmiştir.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years events in the agenda of Turkey seem to be causing increasingly more polarizations in the public. The fact that Turkey is being governed by a conservative political party AKP since 2002 elections creates a big concern particularly on the part of Kemalists against the threat of Sharia<sup>1</sup> that is heightened with the endeavors of the government to remove headscarf bans. Moreover the unsuccessful attempts of the government to solve the Kurdish problem and to terminate the war conditions accompanied with conflicts with regards to political representation of Kurdish people have become other sources of tension in the political atmosphere of Turkey. In this fragmented and polarized political atmosphere modern/traditional binary, ethnicity and religion appear as potential areas of controversy along with other sites of clash which are ignored within the limits of this research. These types of conflictual relations also influenced the women's movement in which there is a heterogeneous group of women who construct their identities on class, race, religion, sexuality and other attributes. Some of the tensions in the movement arouse out of specific problems pertaining to these attributes and their possible clash with the identity of womanhood increased by the pressure of political context.

To be able to follow how the tensions mentioned above are experienced and interpreted by different groups, media provides a fruitful arena particularly through the columns of newspapers where ideas can be found as articulated. Having analyzed

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<sup>1</sup> Sharia means Islamic religious law that governs not only religious rituals, but aspects of day-to-day life in Islam. *Investopedia*, s.v. "Sharia"

columns of Islamists written on a secular woman figure for a previous research, I have found out that woman columnists from various newspapers with different political and ideological leanings differentiate in their approaches from their male counterparts giving implicitly clues of woman cooperation. To give an example, on April 2009 when the house of Türkan Saylan, the president of the Kemalist women organization ÇYDD<sup>2</sup> was busted as part of a big operation called ‘Ergenekon’ conducted against supposedly a terrorist organization, an aggressive stance was adopted by columnists of the Islamist community. Whereas the women columnists known to be part of the same community approached hesitantly to the bust and avoided to make definite judgments and criticized such kind of approaches in their columns. In addition to arbitrary support given by women columnists contrarily to political polarizations, we witnessed the gathering of women from different social and political positions for the sake of common purposes. Feminists and Islamist women came together under the initiative “We are Looking After Each Other”<sup>3</sup> and declared their support to women suffering from headscarf bans. On the other hand ‘religious women’<sup>4</sup> published a declaration against an Islamist newspaper ‘Vakit’ to fire one of their columnist Hüseyin Üzmez who was at that time suspected from sexual harassment while there is little or nothing to be found in other publications

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<sup>2</sup> Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği (Association in Support of Contemporary Living). ÇYDD is a Kemalist non-governmental organization settled dominantly by women and it was established against the Islamic challenge in late 1980s to ‘protect, promote and extend the rights established by the Kemalist principles and reforms and achieving a modern society through modern education.’ “Amacımız,” ÇYDD, accessed October 20, 2011, <http://www.cydd.org.tr/sayfa.asp?id=22>.

<sup>3</sup> “Birbirimize Sahip Çıkıyoruz”. The motivation in the establishment of the platform was to resist against headscarf bans in universities but the scope of the text is defined in a broader manner that any control mechanism on women’s body in the name of modernism, secularism, republic, religion, tradition, custom, morality, honor or freedom is rejected. For more information, please check the website <http://www.birbirimizesahipcikiyoruz.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> They nominated themselves as ‘religious women’ in the text in which they declared their reaction towards the issue: “A Call to Vakit Newspaper from Religious Women”. The blog where the whole text is at first published now opens with an explanation that it was closed since that it achieved its purpose and Hüseyin Üzmez was fired from the Vakit newspaper. The whole text can be found here: <http://www.haber7.com/haber/20081107/Dindar-kadinlardan-Vakite-cagri.php>

known as conservative and/or Islamist. Leaving the discussions about the content of the debates away for now, these cases were giving signs of woman cooperation. However it is very important not to forget that these women showing solidarity through their columns in newspapers and jointly prepared proclamations are only a small group of women in Turkey. Moreover there are also women who positioned against the initiatives mentioned above or participated at the beginning but left some time after due to the disagreements they lived with other members of the groups.

However these patterns are not specific to Turkey, ideological (including feminism) and political (including politics based on identities) positions have always been sources of clashes between women in handling gender issues. Taking advantage of an earlier feminist literature about the negative and excluding results of assuming an abstract woman solidarity and thus sisterhood, I was able to prevent myself to develop a romanticized notion of cooperation that may grow into ignorance of ‘differences between women.’<sup>5</sup> It was realized that the label ‘universal’ was indeed representative of particular interests and concerns, and usually of the dominant side’s. Within the second wave women’s movement in North America, black women were first to give voice to these criticisms that the feminist movement only represents white, educated, middle class women that too much emphasis on ‘sisterhood’ prevents them to come into the picture.<sup>6</sup> Along with contributions of multicultural and postmodern approaches to knowledge any universality claim is approached with suspicion questioning that it is indeed whose ‘universal’ it is. Studies proceeded then

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<sup>5</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (London: Pluto, 2000).  
Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, “Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Postmodernism and Feminism,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 5, no:21 (1988), p.100.

in the direction of laying out ‘realities’ of different groups deriving from their particular positions in the society.

It would be inconsistent to not to take into account difference claims of women for a feminist theory that in its formulation much benefited from critics of enlightenment ideologies as hegemonic constructions. In their article Nancy Fraser and Nicholson argue for the possibility of making politics and social criticism that needs no more to be established on a foundational philosophy and could be ‘more pragmatic, ad hoc, contextual and local’.<sup>7</sup> Along with recognition of diverse political, social and economic conditions of different societies and varying ways of women’s articulation within the conditions in those societies, it becomes less easy to talk about a universal woman’s unity and thus universal prescriptions even in seemingly similar problematic issue areas such as child care, social security and housing.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless it is significant to notice that differences do not have to hinder cooperation since difference by itself is not derivative of conflicts and the opposite of solidarity is not conflict. Moreover not all conflicts have to be disruptive but some of them shall be creative especially helping to estimate and determine possible areas of solidarity : ‘In the struggle to forge solidarity conflict can serve to generate critical reflection upon what divides groups and individuals and so facilitate better understanding of where common ground might be constructed.’<sup>9</sup> Moreover exposure of differences may help to reveal prejudiced views constructed towards ‘the other’ causing an increase in awareness towards marginal parts of the society. Hartsock defends that benefiting upon difference in this way provides an opportunity to handle

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.85.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.102.

<sup>9</sup> Jill Steans, “Negotiating the politics of difference in the project of feminist solidarity,” *Review of International Studies* 33, no.4 (2007), p. 730.

difference in a creative manner by turning them ‘specificities’ rather than an instrument of domination.<sup>10</sup> Treatment of racial differences within feminist practices and theory began to be questioned thanks to criticisms of black women and contributed to the development of feminist theory through inclusion of different kinds of experiences at the same time questioning the existing racism within the movement.

These discussions around experiences and differences which will be elaborated in the following parts shaped the way I handle women’s movement in Turkey, where it is vivid, complex and fragmented; there are women coming from Islamist, Kemalist, Kurdish and socialist movements. This fragmentation at the beginning scared me a bit by adding more and more variables to my analysis and threatening the analysis to tell many but incomplete stories. Yet in a study that is trying to understand and interpret articulations of women from diverse backgrounds on the same issues I could not limit it to certain groups like Islamists and Kurdish women or Kurdish and socialist women. Then I determined three issue areas including family, sexual violence and headscarf and look at how women from the movement articulate their position on these issues in the light of discussions on how to engage with ‘differences between women’ within the women’s/feminist movement and feminist theory.

### Field and Methodology

At the beginning of the research with the aim to study differently articulated positions of women activists on some issues chosen for this study related to womanhood, I have two options in terms of the method. Either I was going to make a

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<sup>10</sup> Nancy Hartsock, *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1998), p.67.

textual analysis using the written material produced in relation to the subject of this study by woman activists coming from different backgrounds and make a critical analysis of them or I was going to make interviews with women. Having decided the content of the questions I'm planning to ask, to the text or to interviewees, has moved me to the final decision over the method. I have a concern to get the answers that are closest to the actual ideas of its owners and through interview method I thought I would have more chance to control and intervene to the process more than I would have vis a vis solid completed texts.

Moreover to learn about women's interpretations on the subjects of family, sexual violence and headscarf I decided to ask not direct 'getting opinion' questions but event-centered ones. Firstly as appropriate to the concept of subjectivity used by this study which assumes that positions are articulated differently due to time and place, context- related questions are tried to be asked. To make concrete, in order to pose a question such as 'what do you think about women's positions and roles within the family?' I have asked their ideas about the frequent calls of Turkey's Prime Minister Erdoğan to Turkish women to give birth at least three children. This at the same provided me the opportunity to discover about how women relate the issue of motherhood to state policies, nationalism and many other institutions and organizations. Based on the same strategy in order to learn women's approaches to sexual violence I preferred to ask the rape cases of a publicly known Islamist columnist and of a tenor working as a staff of the state. By this way I would have chance to elaborate on their position against sexual violence to which they unquestionably disapprove in rhetoric. However the factor that the perpetrators are a respected Islamist columnist among the Islamist community and a state artist would complicate the issue for women activists in establishing their positions as they come

from different backgrounds and have diverse sensitivities and concerns in their struggles. Yet what I need to make clear at this point is that the intent lying under such a formulation of questions is not just to confuse the interviewees by increasing the variables and to test if they could maintain the right position despite the complexity of the issue. There are no predetermined right answers in this study on the grounds of which the replies of the interviewees would be evaluated. On the contrary what is expected to find throughout this study is not the answers but the ways answers are articulated by the women activists in relation to their concerns and priorities.

The interviews were conducted with six women activists coming from Islamist, Kurdish, Kemalist, socialist backgrounds and working in different organizations. The period they have been active in associations varies from 5 years to 25 years and the average is 10 years. The variance in years could be ignored to the extent that the interview questions were chosen from among contemporary events that the earliest happened in 2008. One interview was conducted in fall 2009, another one of them in spring 2010 and the rest of them were conducted in spring 2011. Four of them were either the presidents of the associations or the presidents of the branch offices from different districts of Istanbul. Names of the interviewees have been replaced and the associations they are organized within were not given. The emphasis is neither on the organizations of the associations they work nor on their political and/or cultural identities. Reliving from names and labels would help to concentrate more on the content of the answers in a study which displays an intimate inclination to comprehend the heterogeneity of interests and demands of women in the women's movement. This inclination is not an unconditional one that would be valid for all times but emerged particularly against what is perceived as the

increasing oppression of feminists on women in the women's movement. However it has been a controversial issue area not only in Turkey but also within the women's movements of other countries that for a long time feminist politics and theory has been trying to find the appropriate ways to engage with 'differences among women'. The endeavor for engagement with differences could be claimed as an outcome of the criticisms of women previously marginalized as the feminist movement as in the case of feminism in USA in 1960s. White women were forced to face with the racism inherent in their construction of the women's movement thanks to the critical analyses of black women. Then in one respect the exclusionary reaction showed by the feminist movement may be interpreted as an outcome of a felt challenge from previously ignored women groups against its understanding of feminism.

What is worth to say that except two of them known as affiliated with some political parties other associations under which the interviewees organized are claimed to be independent institutions. Yet none of the associations formally identify a unity that they are organically connected with. On the other hand even though some do not identify their mission in the context of women's movement and act upon the interests of woman as a category, they are treated as parts of the women's movement in Turkey by this study since they are constituted by women and they try to enhance women's position in the society through their activities.

The reasons why I chose these specific subjects of family, sexual violence and headscarf are in close relation with the social and political context of Turkey. The quotation below exposes the significance of context for feminism by defining it as a response to power mechanisms: "Feminist practices are closely linked to their context, and that link is as historical as it is political since these practices are means of resistance that answer a specific design of power. This is the reason why it would

be impossible to speak of ‘feminism’ in the singular, as a unified system of conceptual analysis with determined political priorities.”<sup>11</sup> The author also warns that for the sake of appropriation of feminist practices to the theory, to analyze them in isolation from the specific conditions through which they acquire their meaning ends with the attempts to determine the correct objects of feminism.<sup>12</sup> Therefore these issue areas being contingent on the context would help the author to explore diverse constructions of resistance by women of different backgrounds and by doing so would very much complicate the process of determining the subjects of feminism.

### How to Treat Difference, Experience and Knowledge?

How to incorporate ‘differences between women’ into feminist politics and theory has been the central problem of most of the feminist debates especially since 1980s. For instance it has constituted a challenge to standpoint feminist theory which claimed a privileged access to real knowledge on the part of oppressed and take women as an oppressed group. I will use feminist standpoint theory and the debates made over it as a ground to discuss the concepts of experience, knowledge and domination which are examined in detail by the standpoint theory with a political and epistemological concern to reflect marginalized knowledges. This discussion will help me in my endeavor to interpret different approaches of women to the issues specified for this study by drawing attention to their diversifying experiences and thus knowledges derived from those experiences. Another benefit that this brief discussion over concepts will bring is that it would provide a ground to argue who are the subjects of the women’s movements, a controversial issue that has been

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<sup>11</sup> Lucía Gómez Sánchez and Ana Belén Martín Sevillano, “Experience, Subjectivity and Politics in the Italian Feminist Movement: Redefining the Boundaries between Body and Discourse,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 13, no:4 (2006) pp.343–355.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.344.

increasingly discussed in line with new interpretations of the concepts of experience and knowledge. After then to examine the construction of domination within women's movement would be a key in order to understand the relations among and between subjects and women in claim of subject positions. Dominant group has the ability to establish its perspective as the real one and women's movement is not safe from this as Haraway's definition of feminism implies: 'scientific debate is a contest for the language to announce what will account as public knowledge...Feminism, like science, is a myth, a contest for public knowledge.'<sup>13</sup>

To speak on the relation between dominance and difference as formulated in Welton's work, to deny differences in women's experiences cause the representation of dominant group's experiences as if they are universal as happened in the situation of black women vis a vis white, middle-class western women. To speak on the relation between experience and knowledge; if knowledge is accepted as derived from the experience and that knowledge itself is constructed then experience also could be claimed as a construction. Joan Scott draws attention to the risk of naturalizing experiences in her article written on experience in the context of historical studies. Acceptance of accounts of experience as direct evidences by some traditional historical studies was criticized by Joan Scott for the reason that they leave out the constitution process of those experiences-and thus differences-unexamined.<sup>14</sup> Despite the fact that giving voice to experiences reveals instances of repression and made them known, to exclude context contains a danger of naturalizing and as a consequence recreating differences.

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<sup>13</sup> Katherine Welton, "Nancy Hartsock's Standpoint Theory: From Content to 'Concrete Multiplicity,'" *Women and Politics* 18, no:3 (August 1997), p.8.

<sup>14</sup> Scott, Joan. "Experience." In *Feminists theorize the political*, edited by Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp.23-25.

Standpoint theory takes its roots from Marxism and thus has similarities with it. In Marxist analysis the perspectives of the people are believed to be shaped in connection to productive activity people engage with and due to this formulation capital and labor have different standpoints in society. By adding sexual division of labor to this analysis Hartsock argues that women as responsible of production of both goods and human beings attain a different perspective from men. From this particular standpoint women are claimed to have privileged access to knowledge of the dynamics of the world that are established by the hegemonic group constituted by men. Even though this privileged access to knowledge has an emancipatory potential a feminist analysis of oppression based on women's own experiences is considered necessary to be able to constitute a feminist standpoint. Therefore feminist standpoint is not inherited in all the women: 'This project of transforming subject positions into standpoints involves an active intervention, a conscious and concerted effort to reinterpret and restructure our lives...A standpoint is a project, not an inheritance; it is achieved, not given'.<sup>15</sup> The transformation process from a woman standpoint to a feminist one is criticized however by Welton due to the lack of clarity that how it would realize and what kind of experiences are to be selected as emancipatory.<sup>16</sup> She is also not sure if women have similar experiences or similar interpretations over same experiences considering class and race differences between women:

...it is clear that although the responsibility of the labor of the private sphere may still be regarded as women's preserve, the actual work that is performed cannot be said to rest equally with all women. Furthermore even when there are common experiences, these will have different effects and be interpreted differently, according to a variety of factors, including the class and race, of the subjects involved. The meaning and interpretation of women's

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<sup>15</sup> Hartsock, p.372.

<sup>16</sup> Welton, pp.14-15.

experiences, both common and diverse, does not have the transparency assumed in some ways by Hartsock's original account of the content of the feminist standpoint and method of attaining it.<sup>17</sup>

Welton says that subsequent formulations of standpoint theory shift the emphasis from 'content' to 'concrete multiplicity' that she interprets as becoming closer to postmodernist feminism. Hekman also thinks that the assertion of a privileged access to knowledge by women along with the acknowledgement of diversity of positions held by women is inevitably followed by relativism at least epistemologically. Hekman does not make this argument in order to judge standpoint theory with relativism but just intends to show its similarity to poststructuralist and postmodernist thought.<sup>18</sup>

Collins argues that unless group-based oppressions are taken into consideration as basis of valid, privileged knowledge it would not be possible to work out across differences without falling into the trap of relativism.<sup>19</sup> She argues that the group which standpoint theory takes as subject of analysis is not a monotonous collectivity that gathers around common interests but a group that comes together as result of similar patterns of oppression deriving from hierarchical power relations.<sup>20</sup> Therefore according to Collins the emphasis should not be on individual experiences but social conditions.<sup>21</sup>

Catherine O'Leary is one of the authors criticizing versions of standpoint feminist theory developed by Alison Jaggar and Nancy Hartsock as being insufficient

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Hekman, "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 22, no.2 (1997), p.343.

<sup>19</sup> Collins, p.381.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.376.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.378.

to integrate differences among women to the theory. Even though they mention existence of diverse perspectives of women depending on their different standpoints in the society, it is not accommodated to analyses since women's standpoint and a common vision of women's interests as against men's interests are always prioritized by these authors falling into a kind of universalism.

Establishing an analogy between their universalism the author compares economically defined Marxist proletariat and feminist standpoint theory's woman.<sup>22</sup> For the author Jaggar and Hartsock treat differences as sociological ignoring their epistemological reflections. From this aspect the author finds a similarity between these approaches and Hekman's proposed solution grounded on Weber's ideal type, to be able to grapple with multiplicity of women without falling into essentialism or universalism in the context of standpoint theory. She proposes to keep differences at the sociological level, namely embracing diversity empirically, and separate them from the process of production of knowledge.<sup>23</sup> This kind of treatment towards differences limits the forms of political action however by reducing different experiences and knowledge to a discourse of pluralism without questioning the power relations that cause these differences.<sup>24</sup> O'Leary basically problematizes the link between experience and knowledge established too directly to be able to fall into essentialism as in Hartsock's formulation where 'standpoint is central for the production and interpretation of knowledge claims.'<sup>25</sup> Therefore it is a dilemma that while the theory accepts knowledge as subjective, it conceives the subject positions

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<sup>22</sup> Catherine O'Leary, "Counteridentification or Counterhegemony? Transforming Feminist Standpoint Theory," *Women and Politics* 18, no.3 (December 1997), p.53.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.53.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.55.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.52.

of the oppressed as objective. Even though Hartsock resettles these positions as truer, more adequate accounts, knowledge still derives from groups' experiences. The author differentiates hooks and Collins who write about standpoint of black women from other standpoint theorists in their ability to integrate power relations to discussion of differences between women and to emphasize complexity and heterogeneity of experiences between the members of the same group.<sup>26</sup>

To sum up, in the subsequent formulations of the standpoint theory even though there seems an embracement of multiplicity of women's experiences and interests it is not elaborated much that how they will be integrated to feminist practice. Moreover, experience is to some extent presented as naïve as to constitute a direct evidence about the truth of the stories women tell based on their experiences. However as it is showed in the discussion above, the experiences of the oppressed are constructed as much as dominant groups' experiences. Nevertheless thanks to Collins' remarks to unjust social conditions that oppressed groups live under, their experiences are not mere individual interpretations but contribute to deconstruction of the knowledge established by the dominant groups.

On the other hand among women the experiences and interests of some women are prioritized against others under the guise of their universality. Then the issues they bring to the agenda become more 'woman' issues ends with treating other agendas of women as outside of the women's movement. Supriye Akerkar mentions the exclusionary practices in the women's movement in her own country India in a close relation with power relations:

There exist different perceptions on women's oppression in India and ways to overcome them. However, it appears in the

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<sup>26</sup> O'Leary, p.64.

first instance that these different perceptions have not led to a celebration of a plural practice of feminism. Instead they have led to divisiveness and sectarian tendencies within the movement. They have also led to an inclusion and exclusion of certain issues as 'women's issues' thus creating a hierarchy of issues in the process. This has resulted in a legitimization of the affiliation of certain groups with the women's movement and at the same time invalidated the affiliation of certain groups as being a part of the women's movement.<sup>27</sup>

Attempting to learn approaches of women from diverse backgrounds to same issues this thesis will be sensitive towards different experiences of women without giving priority to any of them but also without forgetting the possibility of unjust conditions that may turn the knowledges of some women irrelevant to women's movement.

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<sup>27</sup> Supriya Akerkar, "Theory and Practice of Women's Movement in India: A Discourse Analysis," *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no:17(Apr. 29, 1995), p.2.

## CHAPTER II

### A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN TURKEY IN THE LIGHT OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOMEN

For a better comprehension of contemporary women's movement in Turkey having its focus on treatment of differences between women by women, to trace historical and political developments would help to make sense of varied positions assumed by women within the women's movement vis a vis particular gender issues. By developments I both refer to those took place within women's movement and in Turkish politics since the latter has always had a visible effect over the former beginning from at least mid-19th century with Tanzimat reforms and in addition women as an oppressed group have also been part to- even though at times they were included as objects into societal projects- and have stakes in the area of politics.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore feminists are appreciated to redefine the domain of political through the introduction of 'gender issues' to political debates particularly through the monthly journal *Pazartesi* published between 1995 and 2002.<sup>29</sup> Moreover embracing diverse problems of women including Kurdish and Islamist women, they provided a different perspective through this journal to Kurdish and Islamist issues that dominated the

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<sup>28</sup> Nükhet Sirman, "Feminism in Turkey: A Short History," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 3, no.1 (Fall 1989). Fatmagül Bertay, "Cumhuriyet'in 75 Yıllık Serüvenine Kadınlar Açısından Bakmak." In *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler*, edited by Ayşe Bertay Hacımirzaoğlu (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> Yeşim Arat, "Rethinking the Political: A Feminist Journal in Turkey, *Pazartesi*," *Women's Studies International Forum* 27, no:3 (August 2004), pp.281-292.

political area during publication years to which the state approached using a suppressive language and policies. Indeed the relation between feminism and the 'political' in Turkey is not one-sided but bilateral. The fact that feminism deals with everyday experiences of women and women's conditions are determined by intertwining of factors of religion, ethnicity, ideology, age, social class and so on, it cannot constitute itself independently from the social and political context of the state and content of other social and political movements. When the feminist movement came back in 1980s the political space was already dominated by other discourses. Nükhet Sirman in her early article 'Feminism in Turkey: A Short History' shows how the content of women's demands are influenced by leftist and Islamist discourses that ranked among oppositional movements in the political area of 1980s. Sirman proposes that an overview of political context is an appropriate method since it prevents to be overwhelmed by various ideas and actions. There is a reciprocal relationship between political space and a movement which has to locate itself into that political space if it has political demands at the same time shaped by its experiences in it. Political discourses have substantially built their arguments on the grounds of women's position in Turkish society especially in times of societal change towards modernization. Thus in order to explore the position of women's movement (and feminism) in Turkey, the author looks at three crucial historical moments. They are Young Turks period triggering from the middle of the 19th century, early years of the Turkish Republic and post-coup period. The first two periods include reform attempts during Ottoman and Republican periods attentive to women's position in society as a proof of modernization initiated by statesmen and maintained by women. In the last period however the women's movement positioned against the state sharing the same political space with other non-formal oppositional

movements of Islamism and leftism which the author finds significant for shaping the content and demands of feminists.<sup>30</sup>

To examine criteria upon which periodizations are determined by different academicians to analyze women's movement in Turkey would maintain concerns of this study to see the unavoidable interaction of feminism and women's movements with other social and political movements, ideologies and also to see the interaction between groups of women from diverse ideological positions. Two main areas will be examined closer in comparison to others since ideologies will be included in this study to the extent of their significance to women's movement: which groups of women have taken place in the movement and how they have interacted with each other in order to explore their understanding of feminism and women's movement in terms of their attitudes towards differences among them. These questions will be tried to deal in order to have contextualized information over women active in the movements that will make the existing situation more meaningful and understandable. To analyze women's movement in their interplay with local political, social and cultural developments may also help to counter against arguments that take women as a monolithic group having common interests. This does not intend to ignore presence of commonalities among women but to avoid the possible constraints and exclusions that may emanate from an emphasis on commonalities.

In my search of different periodizations it seems unavoidable not to include modernization attempts to an analysis of women's movement since mid-nineteenth century which show a substantial interest to position of women in society. The first wave of feminist movement determined by Tekeli as between 1910-1920 due to

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<sup>30</sup> Sirman, p.4.

concentration of activities and demands is claimed to intertwine with ideologies of nationalism, Panturkism, liberalism or Islam depending on the collapse of the empire and the need to formulate a new form of state and society.<sup>31</sup> Assuming a nationalist perspective they criticize Western feminism as the product of Western world that oppress Muslim communities. Therefore it was supportive of the nation state expecting their demands fulfilled by the state. Nevertheless they get involved this process actively by forcing the opportunities for university education, new spheres of jobs and an equal status to women in marriage. Therefore the official discourse that Atatürk ‘gave’ women their rights dismissing the effects of women’s subjectivity on the process was falsified through the studies of feminist historians about women’s rights struggles in late Ottoman period.<sup>32</sup>

Nezihe Muhiddin’s activism as a pioneer in “Women’s Community Party” (Kadınlar Halk Fırkası) and “Turkish Women’s Union” (Türk Kadınlar Birliği) as a women’s rights defender between second constitutional monarchy and early years of the Republican period was explored by Zihnioğlu constituting a challenge to that discourse. The author talks about a conflictual relationship between government and male politicians of the Republic and feminist activists in that period.<sup>33</sup> Muhiddin was arguing that active participation of women to nation-building process is vital for the fulfillment and implementation of reforms and women associated around women’s party and women’s union in order to attain political, social, economic rights and citizenship rights.

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<sup>31</sup> Şirin Tekeli, “Birinci ve İkinci Dalga Feminist Hareketlerin Karşılaştırmalı İncelemesi Üzerine Bir Deneme.” In *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler*, edited by Ayşe Berktaş Hacımırzaoğlu (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1998), p.338.

<sup>32</sup> Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi*, (İstanbul : Metis Yayınları, 1994). Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*, (İstanbul : Metis Yayınları, 2003).

<sup>33</sup>Zihnioğlu, pp.15-21.

In a rather recent article reflecting upon the interaction between Kemalist, Islamist and Kurdish women's movements, the polarization and fragmentation within Turkish feminism is bounded to the rise of identity politics and the approach towards Kemalism.<sup>34</sup> With respect to my previous research on the field concerning this study, Kemalist women seem to be the most reluctant group to embrace difference claims and incorporate differences into the movement by addicting to and idealizing Kemalist ideology. Then it becomes necessary from the point of my study to examine the interactions between Kemalist women and other groups on one hand, interactions between Kemalist women and feminists on the other especially after 1980's when feminists began to critically reflect upon women's place in Turkish modernization.

For this issue it would be beneficial to look at the articles of Yeşim Arat and Nermin Abadan Unat who establish their arguments in favor of Kemalism in terms of the advantages it brought to women.<sup>35</sup> Republican discourse on women was exposed to criticisms by various authors particularly in the book that attempts to evaluate 75 years after the establishment of Republic from the point of men and women through different articles most of which make their analysis taking Republicanism as a reference point. From those years until now Kemalist women as agents of women's movement gradually lost their popularity in academic studies. Yet an awareness of

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<sup>34</sup> Çağla Diner and Şule Toktaş, "Waves of Feminism in Turkey: Kemalist, Islamist and Kurdish Women's Movements in an Era of Globalization," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12, no:1 (March 2010), p.47.

<sup>35</sup> Abadan-Unat, Nermin, Deniz Kandiyoti and Mübeccel Kıray, eds. *Türk Toplumunda Kadın*, Ankara: Türk Sosyal Bilimler Derneği Yayınları, 1979. Abadan-Unat, Nermin. "Söylemden Protestoya: Türkiye'de Kadın Hareketlerinin Dönüşümü." In *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler*, edited by Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 1998); Arat, Yeşim. "The Project of Modernity and Women in Turkey." In *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, edited by Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle : University of Washington Press, 1997).

previous divergence areas between different groups of women and Kemalists would be a check point in the attempt to understand and interpret today's divergences especially considering Arat's arguments that the new generation of feminists still continue to contribute that republican ideal it is necessary to give place to these discussions here.

#### Critics to Egalitarian Feminism by the New Generation of Feminists

In 1980s a new generation of feminists criticized the instrumentalization of women's rights issue for modernization initiated by Tekeli and claim women were used as objects. Some of Arat's articles were to prove that despite the newer generation's critical stance towards imposition of reforms from above, they both benefited from and contribute to these reforms by their activities. To make clear the differences and commonalities in their approach towards Kemalism and Kemalist reforms between two generations who are claimed to benefit from same reforms Arat compares two symbolic names from these generations respectively Nermin Abadan Unat and Şirin Tekeli. The first generation of women are too much attached to the founder of the Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Kemalist reforms feeling indebted to him for making possible their equal existence in public sphere with men. Nermin Abadan Unat is a prominent model of that generation born in the year of 1921 having the opportunity to be the first woman political scientist in Turkey. She conducted her academic studies and women's rights advocacy in line with Kemalism both in Turkey and abroad. Şirin Tekeli as a woman political scientist of a newer generation argues against Kemalist modernization project in its instrumentalization of women's rights for the larger modernization project through objectification of women.<sup>36</sup> At the

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<sup>36</sup> Arat, p.82.

same time Kemalist women's presence is still significant in the movement who already embraced the roles to play in public sphere as framed by modernization project as a state mission. As one of them tells, to own a job means for them not only to earn one's living but also to serve to the modernizing country as representators of 'Turkish woman'.

In another article Arat talks about egalitarian feminists' willingness to take role in enlightenment of the folk in appropriation with populism principle of Kemalist ideology that means governing by the people as well as for the people. Since they undertake this role 'within the confines of a secular, nationalist ideology', they remained limited with the egalitarian perspective which necessarily consists patriarchal elements in a traditional patriarchal society.<sup>37</sup> In the public sphere women have to conceal their sexual identity in order to achieve equality. The newer generation of feminists prompted by Tekeli's arguments perpetuated to problematize this egalitarian discourse used by Kemalist modernization project. They prioritized personal liberation over being devoted to any mission including to save other women and focused on their daily problems especially in private sphere. At this point more woman-oriented approaches occurred via exaltation of individual concerns and interests departing from earlier modernist republican perspectives. Yet taking into account women's inferior position in the society at that period, Arat defends they need first to fight against customs and traditions that prevents reforms to bring into force rather than challenging the defined identities and status.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Yeşim Arat, "Feminist Mirror in Turkey: Portraits of Two Activists in the 1980s." In *Challenges to Democracy in the Middle East*, William Harris et al (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> Arat, p.120.

After all, Arat explicates how Kemalism critics of new generation paradoxically contribute to the Kemalist modernization project by renovating it. The principle of laicism, according to Arat, was abided both by Kemalist feminists and the newer generation of feminists even though the latter group seems to be in contradiction with republican framing of modernization project. Their aim was to achieve universal values, yet their instruments in the way of that object were differed. Being the subjects of their own struggle by mostly becoming a part of civil society organizations especially after 1980s, contemporary feminists developed a separate understanding from the authoritarian, enforced modernization. This critical approach towards Kemalist modernization may become one of the main reasons to explain the absence of a direct clash between Islamists and feminists, which Arat anticipates a confrontational relation considering the experiences of feminist movements in Islamic countries. Tekeli summarizes the characteristics of second wave feminists in Turkey showing their stance against Kemalism:

New wave feminists are not nationalists, and they pursue a critical approach towards Kemalist authoritarianism. On the other hand, they do not define themselves as “Muslims” either. With regards to religion, they are either neutral or atheist. Usually, their attitude towards fundamentalist women differs from the “ignoring” approach of the Kemalist women. However, they too are concerned about Turkey breaking away from secularity and becoming an Islamic state. They support democratization at the face of issues related to Islam and the Kurds. Lastly, they portray a critical and skeptical attitude about issues relating to state sovereignty.<sup>39</sup>

Unat remarks a contradiction in discourse and activities of the radical feminists by claiming the significance of state support to foundations of ‘Women's Artifacts Library and Information Center Foundation’ (Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı) and ‘Purple Roof Women’s Shelter

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<sup>39</sup> Tekeli, “Birinci ve İkinci Dalga Feminist Hareketlerin Karşılaştırmalı İncelemesi Üzerine Bir Deneme,” p.338. Turkish version of the quotation is available in APPENDIX A.

Foundation' (Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı) which are claimed to be established by feminists' own struggle.<sup>40</sup> Unat makes this remark more to bring the similarities between them and Kemalist feminists into attention than to criticize the former's choices. Unat stresses the factor of generation difference for the disagreements about conceptualization of feminism but she claims their ultimate aims are the same; to provide equality. Differences appear at two points according to her; firstly they don't believe the necessity of behaving like a man to be able to exist in public sphere and claim equal rights that also embrace women's differences. Secondly they differentiate in their view of laicism, yet later in the same article it appears that what she means with differentiation is the support given to Islamist women against headscarf bans in universities by radical feminists. However their defense does not mean an approval of Islamic dictates about women's use of body but a reaction to the discrimination made by the system between male and female followers of the same ideology. They also defended it as a women's right to dress without a critical interrogation of the reasons to cover in the context of Islamic rules.<sup>41</sup>

Unat never believes Islamist women could have free will and could prefer headscarf basing on this will as can be understood from the passive positioning of them in her sentences: "The particular social groups (such as class and religious order) to which Islamist women belong, teach them values which condemn modernity."<sup>42</sup> Unat also tries to show Islamist women are not feminists, as they say so, and could not be. Their role models are the Muslim women of the Prophet

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<sup>40</sup> Abadan-Unat, p.332

<sup>41</sup> Arat, *Rethinking the Political*, p.288.

<sup>42</sup> Unat, *Söylemden Protestoya*, p.333. "İslamcı kadınlara içinde buldukları toplumsal kümeler (sınıf, tarikat gibi) çağdaşlığı mahkum eden değerlerle bakmayı öğretiyor."

Mohammed's period; the ultimate aim of the Islamist movement they belong to is a political and social system that imagines two separate worlds based on sexes. Lastly even they have their own radicals, both the traditional and radicals are told/indoctrinated to obey fathers, husbands... They could be politicized yet what that politicization brought to them concerning sensitivity towards women issues or problems or is that only sensitivity for their 'victimization'. This is still a valid question among the women's movement and Islamist women's positioning into it. However some of the Islamist women are sick of these litmus tests, like homosexual case, to prove their sensitivity to all other victimizations, while it is not an issue for other groups. Even the requisite of proving this is itself discrimination according to them. It is understandable that Unat defends her generation of Kemalist women who directly benefited from the reforms that made crucial differences in their fates, yet she could not save from handling all the Kemalist women as a homogeneous group. She tells they struggle on the basis of three targets:

Actualizing the equality of rights between men and women within the framework of human rights and democratic liberties and with this purpose, making civil society and public administration more sensible towards these issues b) Without any concessions, warranting to protect the principle of secularity which is considered the main assurance of woman's equal status in society c) Supporting the socio-economic structural transformations which will ensure that women establish their economic independence so that they can become citizens who are conscious of the values of freedom and equality.<sup>43</sup>

Berktaý identifies internalization of republican ideology by women accompanied with the illusion that women achieved all the necessary things they should achieve through the Kemalist reforms as *an internal obstruct* in the development of an

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.335. "İnsan hakları ve demokratik özgürlükler çerçevesinde kadın-erkek arasındaki hak eşitliğini gerçekleştirmek, bu amaçla sivil toplumla kamu yönetimini duyarlı kılmak, b) Kadının eşitlikçi toplumsal konumunun başlıca teminatı sayılan laiklik ilkesinin ödünsüz korunmasını sağlamak c) Kadının özgürlük ve eşitlik değerlerinin bilincine kavuşmuş bir yurttaş olabilmesi için onun ekonomik bağımsızlığını sağlayacak olan sosyo-ekonomik yapısal dönüşümleri desteklemek."

independent consciousness that would interrogate sex roles and relations in a radical manner.<sup>44</sup> To gain subjectivity is the most difficult issue women encounter in a patriarchal society where it is in the privilege of men to define women in line with their own interests and values. As Turkish modernization discourses were shaped through the position of women in society, determining the extent of modernization intertwined with a moralist discourse imposing conditions over women's existence in public sphere. The ideal woman image constructed by Republican project had a concern to find a balance between being a-la-turca and being unchaste. For women to be able to exist in public sphere to alleviate these concerns, they have to comply with the image hegemony (this time republicanists) created, that is far from any signs of sex (female) to the extent of adopting manlike behaviors.<sup>45</sup> Ayşe Kadioğlu says woman as carriers of religious, familial, national values could gain status and respectability yet this does not prevent them to be imprisoned to those conceptualizations.<sup>46</sup> Then Berktaş remarks the necessity for women to save themselves from all imposed identities to determine their own fate by deeply questioning patriarchal images and rules with a critical, independent conscious which will require breaking off relations with the prevailing ideology. Indeed other ideologies prevalent in different periods (as statist or anti-statist) were either not exempt from patriarchal notions:

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<sup>44</sup> Berktaş, Fatmagül. "Cumhuriyet'in 75 Yıllık Serüvenine Kadınlar Açısından Bakmak." In *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler*, edited by Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 1998), p.5. Turkish Women's Union was closed in 1935 pretending that the raison d'être of the association was nullified due to women's getting the same rights with men.

<sup>45</sup> Berktaş, p.7.

<sup>46</sup> Kadioğlu, Ayşe. "Cinselliğin İnkârı: Büyük Toplumsal Projelerin Nesnesi Olarak Kadınlar." In *75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler*, edited by Ayşe Berktaş Hacımiraçoğlu (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 1998), p.89.

In addition to determining the significant differences between the new era and the previous one in which Islamic rules and values were dominant, it is also interesting to follow the mental continuities which are formulated on the basis of patriarchy. Although in the new nation-state women are also encouraged to take part in the public space as citizens, the deep rooted fear about and the threat posed by the possibility of women transgressing the boundaries established by male sovereignty occupies men's minds. The fear arising at the face of such a threat is now referred to as *fitne* (sedition) in Islamic terms. However, even in the most secular environments such as the leftist movements of the 1970's, this fear can still be disguised under a discourse carrying Islamic undertones.<sup>47</sup>

Ayşe Kadioğlu in her article about the relations between societal projects and objectification of women gives a historical overview of how the feminist discourse to emancipate 'other' –non-Western- women from their oppressive cultures was instrumentalized to legitimate colonialism. In the context of modernization projects prior to nation building processes two contradictory discourses constructed: westernization discourse assumed by local intellectuals adopting colonial feminist discourse and a counter discourse that emphasize traditions and specificities. Yet a commonality between them occurs in their treatment of women as objects rather than individuals in attempts to adjust society appropriately to their projects. Same commonality in the context of Turkey emerges in the discourses of three big societal projects: Kemalism, political Islam and socialism in which woman question was dissolved within and sacrificed to larger cases. Early Republican reforms put women in a challenging position by demanding them both to take role in achieving contemporary civilization level as patriotic citizens and to be good mothers and wives in the private sphere.<sup>48</sup> Sexuality was excluded in this patriotic discourse as opposed to promiscuous Western woman image:

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<sup>47</sup> Berktaş, p.3. Turkish version of this quotation is available in APPENDIX A.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.94.

Western woman was highly criticized due to her promiscuity and her extravagant make-up. New woman of the Republic was expected to be “modern but modest”, responsible, provident and compassionate. They were burdened with the tough responsibility of establishing a balance between the traditional, *a la turca* image and unchastity that is extreme modernity to express sexual independence as Western women do. The tension between *a la turca* and unchastity has maintained its existence as an element of disturbance on the minds of Turkish women ever since the beginning of the Republican period.<sup>49</sup>

In a similar manner overriding sexuality was also a precondition for Muslim women to exist in public sphere and to use headscarf intends to increase the emphasis on personality rather than sexuality. The need to give a message to other persons for a woman to prove/show that their acting/existing in public sphere does not contain anything that would be related with sexuality marks a deeper problem that women are comprehended only through their sexuality. When women became visible in public sphere they have to prove these men their aims to be able to exist. These proofs could be provided through their clothes, hair color or shoes. Internalization of these criteria by some women caused even to being strict followers of them to the extent of putting pressure to other women.

### Creating an Independent Movement

Transcending an equal rights perspective, feminism in 1980s differentiated from the women movements of earlier periods; the issue of ‘women oppression’ as a struggle area was problematized.<sup>50</sup> Feminists have been very sensitive and in agreement about independence of the movement which is indeed a negative independence

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<sup>49</sup> Batılı kadın cinsel serbestliği ve abartılı makyajı nedeniyle şiddetle eleştiriliyordu. Cumhuriyet’in yeni kadınının ‘modern ancak mütevazı,’ sorumlu, tutumlu ve şefkatli olması bekleniyordu. Geleneksel, alaturka imaj ile iffetsizlik, yani Batılı kadınlar gibi cinsel serbestliğini ilan edecek denli aşırı modernlik arasında bir denge kurmak gibi güç bir görev yüklenmişti sırtlarına. Alaturkalık ile iffetsizlik arasındaki gerilim, Türk kadınlarının zihninde Cumhuriyet döneminin başlangıcından bu yana huzursuzluk yaratıcı bir unsur olarak varlığını sürdürmektedir. Ibid, p.86.

<sup>50</sup> Sirman, p.18.

understanding like independence from worker's movement or nationalist movement. Modes of legitimate political participation, the definition of politics and conceptualizations of democracy and individuality have been questioned after the coup which found its reflections on the women's movement.<sup>51</sup> At this juncture they borrowed from Western feminism some structures such as 'non-hierarchical and independent forms of organizations, consciousness raising groups, issue-oriented ad-hoc committees.'<sup>52</sup> The author makes an observation for the women of the period within the movement: '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.'<sup>53</sup> In fact concentration of the agenda of the movement over violence against women especially in private sphere and the use of sexuality of as a medium for male domination, being affected from agenda of the second wave in the West, helped much to gather women from different positions as being issues concerning almost all women irrespective of their ethnicity, class and religion.<sup>54</sup> Yet despite a range profile of women participating to the campaigns in those years, the women activists during this phase are mostly socialists gained experience in leftist organizations.<sup>55</sup> However they evaluated these experiences from a critical perspective exposing gender-biased attitudes of the men in leftist groups, hidden meanings of the 'sister' (bacı) discourse particularly during consciousness

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.15.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>54</sup> Diner and Toktaş, pp. 41- 57.

<sup>55</sup> Çakır, Devrim, ed. *Özgürlüğü Ararken: Kadın Hareketinde Mücadele Deneyimleri*. İstanbul: Amargi Kadın Bilimsel ve Kültürel Araştırmalar Yayıncılık Dayanışma Kooperatifi, 2005.

raising groups meetings. Theoretically, subordination of women's issue to the main issue of class conflict in leftist ideology has become the source of a prominent debate causing divisions among women. Some women were accused of assuming a defensive position vis a vis the leftist sects and spend their energy to prove them the necessity of feminist ideology. A division occurred among women over this issue separated into radical feminists and socialist feminists, latterly publishing different feminist journals called respectively Feminist and Kaktüs which will be discussed below. Şule Aytaç, a member of the core feminist group which began first as a translation group of Western feminist literature., mentions a concept similar to Berktaş's 'internal obstructs' developed by that group as 'internal chains' that until women continue to evaluate themselves from the eyes of men they could not save themselves from those chains which confines them to men's definitions.

The book "In Search of Freedom" (Özgürlüğü Ararken), made available the discussions held in previous meetings at Amargi under the general topic "Experiences of Struggle within Women's Movement" (Kadın Hareketinde Mücadele Deneyimleri). It provides students of women's studies, interested academicians or merely the curious people a contextual account on the rise of feminism in 1980s in Turkey. First it becomes appear in diverse accounts of women that the label 'feminism' has had very negative connotations that it was an indicator of courage to explicitly embrace feminist identity in society. Women's attempt to undertake pursuit of their own interest separately from men (of any ideology), a very feminist strategy, was evaluated interestingly (or uninterestingly) as out of morality. In other words for women to speak for themselves is directly associated with immorality. This type of understanding seems to be precursor of a traditional/religious belief that views women as a source of fitna. On the other hand

men's reaction could also be interpreted as of a recognized danger of such a movement since in patriarchal societies to struggle for women's interests implies a direct clash with men's interests expanded to the detriment of women. Further from the aspect of social/ideological movements it has the potential to cause a division between men and women of the same movement creating a different and fundamental axe of oppression to struggle against.<sup>56</sup>

### The Meaning and Limits of Feminist Ideology in Turkey

Even though material conditions are adequate for feminist ideology to emerge in Turkey, basically existence of an oppressed group of women there must be an awareness of this oppression as well.<sup>57</sup> Tekeli connects the limitations to the development of feminism in Turkey to underdeveloped economy, family as a patriarchal and economic institution, lower levels of education as structural obstacles. Passing throughout the historical categories focusing on social and economic structure of the society, family seems to be the most stable/widespread institution especially in determining a woman's life. Still recognizing their validity for the status of women, according to Tekeli, neither Tanzimat reforms –which provided women new opportunities to get out of their houses nor Kemalist reforms – part of it was the adaptation of Swiss Civil Code claimed to bring women to an equal status with men- could improve the position of women and decrease their

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<sup>56</sup> Şule Aytaç says the fact that women belong to different classes was used to distract attention from common oppression of women against the threat of division of working class along the lines of gender. Moreover one Kurdish women participated to the meeting titled 'Kurdish Women's Movement and Associational Experiences' indicates her unwillingness to cooperate with Turkish women who are unaware of the difficulties of Kurdish identity struggle. Since they are in a struggle to gain Kurdish identity recognition, such cooperation would disintegrate her Kurdish identity. Aytaç, Şule. "Türkiye'de Feminist Hareketin Oluşumu." In *Özgürlüğü Ararken*, edited by Devrim Çakır (İstanbul: Amargi Kadın Bilimsel ve Kültürel Araştırmalar Yayıncılık Dayanışma Kooperatifi, 2005), p.213.

<sup>57</sup> Tekeli, Şirin. "The Meaning and Limits of Feminist Ideology in Turkey." In *Women, Family and Social Change in Turkey*, edited by Ferhunde Özbay (Unesco:Bangkok, 1990), p.140.

independence from family. During the transformation of the society from a rural-agricultural to an urban-industrial one, more women have been employed in different fields depending on their educational and socio-economic background such as factory work, textile, banking and secretariat. Yet “work has not brought them emancipation. It would even be very hard to say that they have gained economic independence.”<sup>58</sup> Their income mostly incorporated into family budget as additional income, and besides they continue to practice domestic works along with the work outside. There is also ‘a handful of women’ with high status professions, earning relatively higher incomes and have other women to get the housework done. However this group remains to be marginal at that time and mentioned as the most emancipated group by the author who are daughters of the first generation of females that directly benefited from Kemalist reforms.

As can be seen, when we talk about women in Turkey they do not constitute a homogeneous group. It is expectable that their experiences of oppression vary depending on their daily interactions with family, friends, colleagues, neighbors. The question is how the communication between feminism and these groups of women, which may be split into subgroups, goes ahead and to what extent feminist ideology is relevant to these groups. Since feminism began to be visible in the press in early 1980s, women interested with this new thinking were middle-class, urban and educated and like Western feminists they define themselves in terms of work, social problems, politics and so on. Tekeli nevertheless reminds that despite existence of elite characteristics and sociological commonalities with Western feminists, these women differentiated from other elite women since: “for them, the liberation of

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.148.

women means the liberation of gender, not only their own individual emancipation. Hence they give primary importance to the idea of solidarity.”<sup>59</sup>

### Islamist Women’s Movement

Cihan Aktaş, one of the most salient figures of the Islamist women had written many books over the historical background of headscarf dispute, the challenge of authority to it, position of Muslims and women in public sphere.<sup>60</sup> She introduces the period of socialization of covered women in educational and socio-cultural areas starting with 1970s with respect to processes of restructuring attempts of Muslims in Turkey in conjunction with other world Muslims attempts. Covered women established some women organizations during these years: ‘Hanımlar İlim ve Kültür Derneği’ (1973), ‘İdealist Hanımlar Derneği’ (1975), ‘Mukaddesatçı Hanımlar Derneği’ (1975). They were giving conferences concerning women, organize meetings for particular days such as holy nights and interest with issues like to provide Hagia Sophia to Muslim’s usage. The mobilization of women inevitably was brought to the Muslims agenda that attempted to question both women’s position in society and her social identity as a human being. Authors of Milli Newspaper engaged with these issues in their columns critical of the failures in women’s services (appropriate to their dispositions) due to their outside activities, or directly critical of women’s acting out of the house.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Tekeli, *Feminist Ideology*, p.155.

<sup>60</sup> Cihan Aktaş, *Tanzimat’tan 12 Mart’a Kılık Kıyafet ve İktidar* (İstanbul : Kapı Yayınları, 2006); Cihan Aktaş, *Tanzimat’tan Günümüze Kılık Kıyafet ve İktidar: 12 Mart’tan 12 Eylül’e* (İstanbul : Nehir Yayınları, 1989-1990); Cihan Aktaş, *Türbanın Yeniden İcadı* (İstanbul : Kapı Yayınları, 2006).

<sup>61</sup> Cihan Aktaş, *Tanzimat’tan Günümüze Kılık Kıyafet ve İktidar: 12 Mart’tan 12 Eylül’e* (İstanbul : Nehir Yayınları, 1989-1990), pp.64-65.

Despite these criticisms and ongoing reformulations of women's existence in public sphere by Islamists, visibility of religious women on the grounds of activism increased since 1970s. As part of political struggle given against headscarf bans in universities Islamist women participated to protests along with Islamist men which are claimed to contribute to the former's politicization whose relations are very loose with outside of the house. However it was not a sudden effect of participating protests that make available for women to go outside and organize. Ramazanoğlu provides various reasons for these communities that led their daughters, wives to take education and organize and religious communities and/or conservative parties' women commissions. Migration from rural to urban in 1980s forced people to reformulate ways of living/practicing religion in concert with urban life and to take their share from opportunities of the urban. In the context of these attempts to have education was taken as a strategy to adapt to the city without losing one's identity. Thus a new generation of girls from conservative families did not consent to lives of their mothers who even never used transportation vehicles.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover development of communication channels and the spread of TVs led the experiences of other women to enter into the houses by influencing parents' ideas about the inevitability of their daughters' taking education. In this context Islamic religious vocational schools were opened to girls as an attractive alternative where these girls could both take religious and secular education.<sup>63</sup> Graduates of these schools later claimed to be able to enter into universities with their headscarves. These women in the way of improving themselves by opening of the channels were

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<sup>62</sup> Ramazanoğlu, Yıldız. "Yol Ayrımında İslamcı ve Feminist Kadınlar." In *Osmanlıdan Cumhuriyet'e Kadının Tarihi Dönüşümü*, edited by Yıldız Ramazanoğlu (İstanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 2000).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.141-143.

no more dependent on men for the knowledge of the outside but able to construct their own. They began to bring criticisms to men in their communities through their experiences in educational areas and work places as the new actors.<sup>64</sup> As I have stated a memory of Hidayet Tuksal's from a lesson in university that a woman's asking a question to the instructor was interpreted as an attempt to prove herself rather than a real curiosity.

Their existence in workplaces also approached suspiciously in contrast to other women. Depending on the women images in search of knowledge from Prophet Mohammed's period Ramazanoğlu questions the restriction of women to private sphere in our times whereas male believers engaged in any attempt to be integrated to the system.<sup>65</sup> In their new position they engaged in dialogue with 'uncovered women' more comfortably than their sisters (bacı).<sup>66</sup> Moreover Elif Toros and Nihal Karaca mentions Islamist men met with money and power in 1980s mostly married with second wives.<sup>67</sup>

On the side of political experiences, women commissions in Welfare Party which Ramazanoğlu argues tried to own above mentioned developments should be considered in terms of their effects and outcomes to the women. The endeavor of women in these commissions during local election campaigns of 1994 was evaluated as the basic factor for its considerable success.<sup>68</sup> Supporting and helping people outside the home on the other hand increased women's self confidence and raising

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<sup>64</sup> Ruşen Çakır, "Dindar Kadının Serüveni," *Birikim* 137(2000), pp.27-35.

<sup>65</sup> Ramazanoğlu, p.145.

<sup>66</sup> Cihan Aktaş, "Kamusal Alanda İslâmcı Kadın ve Erkeklerin İlişkilerindeki Değişim Üzerine: Bacıdan Bayana," *Birikim* 137 (2000), pp.36-47.

<sup>67</sup> Çakır, p.29.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

their status in the eyes of their husbands.<sup>69</sup> Yet despite those women's huge endeavor and self-sacrifices during these campaigns, some other women outside these commissions were given positions in the party which created a huge resentment.

“An important reason of erudite silence is the will to sustain the hardly caught partial independence thanks to the party, swallowing everything as soon as possible. The foremost reason behind the ‘erudite silence’ instead of political opposition is certainly the perception of politics that had obtained religious content. (Consent of Allah- father and husband)”<sup>70</sup> As this silence began to be broken the limits of cooperation over political issues have begun to be expanded to groups out of Islamist community.

#### Islamist Women's Interaction with Feminism

Ramazanoğlu basically criticizes feminists in their failure to handle diversity of women in Turkey both by prioritizing Western women's experiences and contribute to the hegemonic discourse of the state. She claims even though women's movement broke its organic ties to Kemalist women movements, they keep a psychological link. This is very similar to Arat's arguments. Despite the claim of feminists in differentiating from Kemalist women, Islamist women feel similar ways of exclusion by those groups. Nazife Şişman is a strict defender of this argument that in the publications concerned with Islamist women they continue to assume a privileged position for ‘contemporary’ women in public sphere at least one author binds holding

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<sup>69</sup> Ramazanoğlu, p.148.

<sup>70</sup> Eraslan, Sibel. “Refahlı Kadın Tecrübesi.” In *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Kadının Tarihi Dönüşümü*, edited by Yıldız Ramazanoğlu (İstanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 2000). Hikmetli sessizliğin önemli bir sebebi de, parti sayesinde zar zor yakalanan kısmi özgürlüğü, her şeye rağmen, her şeyi sineye çekerek gittiği yere kadar sürdürebilmek istencidir. Siyasi muhalefet yerine var olan ‘hikmetli sessizliğin’ en önemli sebebiyse, kuşkusuz dini içerik kazanmış siyaset algısıdır. (Allah-baba-koca onayı).

of Islamist women in public sphere to concessions taken from system.<sup>71</sup> The word concession disturbs Şişman implying that they come to a point in the system despite they do not deserve as covered women but the system bestowed them against its principles. Şişman observes an oriental approach towards Islamist women in some of these studies in their marginalization of Islamist women as women need to be emancipated from the pressure posed by men and from headscarf as the symbol of this pressure. This marginalization makes invisible the hegemonic structure by putting its discourse and knowledge to the center. In studies over Islamist women, researchers situate themselves in a position to define Islamist women as backward or determine their position setting ‘modernity’ as criteria.<sup>72</sup> Thus viewing Muslim women as people to be saved from their inferior position they do not believe it is an independent choice to wear headscarf but as an outcome of men’s repression. Precisely because of this idea a student wearing headscarf is a challenge to the assumption and modernization will remove these backward demands.

Another approach Şişman defines as “affirmative transformation” (olumlayarak dönüştürme). There is an expectation from Islamist women to be a transforming force in Islamist community towards modernization based on their questioning of the patriarchal system, their struggle to participate to the social life. Unless this role imposed by feminists realized by Islamist women, their attitudes are favored. Thus the alleged attempt to understand covered women actually looks for the fulfillment of their expectations rather than a sincere effort to understand.

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<sup>71</sup> Nazife Şişman, “Türkiye’de Çağdaş Kadınların İslamcı Kadın Algısı.” In *Osmanlı’dan Türkiye’ye Kadının Tarihi Dönüşümü*, edited by Yıldız Ramazanoğlu (İstanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 2000), p.118.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.124.

In their position against men Islamist women differ from feminists, Aktaş says, due to some verses of the Quran advising friendship and cooperation between men and women rather than a destructive relationship.<sup>73</sup> Their main concern was to find alternative ways of existence as religious persons in a modern world. These attempts were motivated firstly in 1970s through the impositions created by necessities of life and increased in 1980s through the migration from rural.<sup>74</sup> Aktaş says the most important activity in 1980s was ‘reading’ to constitute an identity appropriate to religious references. Discussions made in Zaman newspaper on September 1987 were mark of an internal interrogation process questioning the traditional motherhood, wifehood, bridal roles. Yet particularly search of covered students of alternative life styles not between but beyond modern/traditional or laic/anti-laic polarizations was not sufficiently dealt with by feminists. Self explanations of covered students to use headscarf were not given importance by most of the feminists based on the idea that it is a symbol of sharia putting women in a secondary position.<sup>75</sup> Moreover the lack of interest to organized attempts of covered women against bans according to Aktaş is related with setting agenda of feminism in Turkey in accordance with white Western feminist agenda.

### Kurdish Women’s Movement and Feminism

The status of Kurdish women in the context of women’s movement in Turkey has been analyzed in some academic studies on the basis of a comparison made with the black women in the women’s movement in late 1960s of USA. These studies benefited much from the literature on black feminism to explain the specific

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<sup>73</sup> Aktaş, *Türbanın Yeniden İcadı*, p.250.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p.342.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.252.

experiences of Kurdish women in Turkey as another marginalized group of women both within the women's movement and within the state.<sup>76</sup> Handan Çağlayan's book "Mothers, Comrades and Goddesses: Women in the Kurdish Movement and The Construction of Women's Identity" is one of the very first books written on the identity construction process of Kurdish women after 1980s.<sup>77</sup> Drawing from the previous researchs made on the relation between nationalism and women, Çağlayan claims contradictory effects of the participation of women to the national and ethnic movements, due to the maintenance of traditional women roles by ideologies while mobilization process has empowering effects on women. The study has the concern to reflect particularly the viewpoints of Kurdish women who are either claimed to be liberated by the movement or remained as passive objects mobilized by nationalist Kurdish men. The author says the reality is dynamic and multidimensional as opposed to the explanations that ignore subjectivity of women within the movement.<sup>78</sup> From this aspect incorporating Kurdish women's perspectives into discussion is necessary to understand the motivations behind the societal and political mobilization of Kurdish women and the effects of the process on them during 1980s and 1990s. Çağlayan attempts to integrate Kurdish women's voice to the arguments that would unsettle the dichotomously established images of Kurdish women as liberated women or as victims.<sup>79</sup> An important emphasis in this study is made to the subjectivities of Kurdish women corresponding to their position in

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<sup>76</sup> Handan Çağlayan, *Analar, Yoldaşlar, Tanrıçalar*, (Ph.d diss., Ankara University, 1971). Zeynep Kutluata, *The Politics of Difference Within the Feminist Movement as Manifested in the case of Kurdish Women/Feminist Journals* (Master's Thesis, Bosphorus University, 2003); Metin Yüksel, *Diversifying Feminism in Turkey* (Master's Thesis, Bilkent University, 2003).

<sup>77</sup> Handan Çağlayan, *Analar, Yoldaşlar, Tanrıçalar*, (Ph.d diss., Ankara University, 1971).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.2-3.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.3-7

Kurdish movement from within the frameworks of new social movements and ethnicity based projects. Çağlayan quotes in her study, Melucci, in whose theorization of new social movements an interactive process is supposed between the construction of collective and individual identities.<sup>80</sup> Collective identity and the subjects positioned in it are subject to change through collective actions within the movement. Individual identities of the members of the group are affected from their collective acts within the group.

According to the author this explains the gap between differing representations of Kurdish women as mothers and/or activists and the ways Kurdish women define and position themselves within the movement as result of an interactive process.<sup>81</sup> It is argued that since 1980s the images of Kurdish women have been altered due to the political context of the country according to which national liberation projects are reconstructed each time attributing different roles to women. On the other hand to be able to better comprehend the situation of Kurdish women in the movement their particular conditions have to be considered, thinks Çağlayan; women may have common problems deriving from their womanhood but they live their womanhood in interaction with their class, ethnicity and race. Moreover when these differences are failed to consider, those women may conceivably appear as victims to others and other women as well. Patriarchal bargaining is one of the concepts that Çağlayan uses to prove that women are not only passive receivers of the roles given to them.<sup>82</sup> As evidence she shows appropriation of the Kurdish movement's discourse by women in their resistance

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p.10.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.8

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp.36-37.

against the violence they experience at home. Some women defined the violence in the house as opposed to democracy and equality which are defended by the movement and even some of them applied to the party to complain about their husbands' conducts.<sup>83</sup> On the other hand the movement itself developed the concept of 'false manhood' to criticize *feudal* structure of Kurdish families in which men dominate. Yet Çağlayan argues that even though this criticism has the capacity to democratize the relations within the house, this concept implies another version of manhood which is claimed to be the true one.<sup>84</sup> Along with the criticism of old family structure the concept of pride has been ceased to be defined over women's bodies. Yet at this time the soil was started to be seen as a sacred thing that needs to be protected from male gaze/intervention.<sup>85</sup> Despite the establishment of a connection between homeland and woman body, to remove the direct link between pride and body provided an opportunity for Kurdish women to come out of their houses, says Çağlayan.

Previous discourses used by Kurdish movement have been directly addressing men and alerting them against the (sexual) dangers of the women who may degrade the movement. Then in 1990s the previously dangerous woman also became an addressee of the discourses and defined as reliable comrades. However for women to be reliable comrades was a conditioned position; it is granted only in the larger party family and expect women to ignore their sexuality.<sup>86</sup> An unequal situation here occurs between men and women according to the author that men could save

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.235.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.249.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., pp.33-35.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.133.

themselves from “false manhood” just by participating to the movement while women are expected to make more sacrifices.<sup>87</sup>

Women were willing to ignore their sexuality in the context of the movement since it brought them partial independence. For instance when a woman goes out late in the evening neighbors do not judge her if they know the reason is somewhat related with their sacred case. One woman really experiences this sense of holiness: “When I go to the party I feel myself as if I’m going to the places of the Saints.”<sup>88</sup> Without religious concerns the women began to shake the hands of men of the same community, which invalidates the ablution according to Shafi sectarian (a sect in Islam), since those men are believed to be their brothers. One interviewee in the study says she shakes the hands of men but she continues to pray to which ablution is a precondition. As part of this partial relief in the relations between men and women and the changing perception of pride, women’s perception of their own bodies and honor has also been transformed. A woman under custody says she interprets the molestation of the officials in the prison no longer as a fault and dirtiness of her own and begins to speak more easily about the sexual harassments she was exposed to under custody.<sup>89</sup>

After a detailed analysis of the relations between men and women in the Kurdish movement the author provides excerpts in the last part from the interviews she made with Kurdish women who define themselves in relation to their identities. According to the data achieved through interviews women with political experiences choose to define themselves primarily with their ethnic identities. Some of them

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.136.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.220. “Ben partiye gittiğim zaman evliyaya gidiyor gibi hissediyordum.”

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.223

made references to their jobs but these are the women who did not take an active role in the movement. The author binds the choice of the majority of women who firstly identify themselves with Kurdish identity to both their politicization process grounded upon Kurdishness and the real life experiences arouse out of this identity. These are experiences generally told as the mothers, sisters and wives of the guerillas. In a review on this book it is reminded that even though women were motivated from the unjust treatments they experienced as being relatives of some men during 1980s and 1990s; the number of educated, middle class Kurdish women is currently increasing who have a feminist perspective and adds that it may bring class-based clashes to the movement in the near future.<sup>90</sup>

There seems an agreement that participation of Kurdish women to the Kurdish struggle did not arise out of woman consciousness, it indeed developed later from within the struggle particularly since the beginning of 1990s.<sup>91</sup> However the process has its contradictions for Kurdish women in terms of determining a position in the Kurdish struggle, in women's movement and/or in other political struggles. For instance a homosexual and Kurdish woman mentions the difficulties of expressing herself in the queer movement in which she is criticized by giving prominence to her Kurdish identity. Therefore, she says, it is a huge burden for women to situate at the intersection of different kinds of oppression such as nationalism, heterosexism, patriarchy and racism and this situation isolates the person in any single movement.<sup>92</sup> She adds that it is inevitable for her to handle the

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<sup>90</sup> Nazan Üstündağ, "Kürt Hareketinde Kadınlar ve Kadın Kimliğinin Oluşumu," *Feminisite*, accessed May 20, 2011, <http://feminisite.net/news.php?act=details&nid=349>

<sup>91</sup> Çakır, Devrim, ed. *Özgürlüğü Ararken: Kadın Hareketinde Mücadele Deneyimleri*. İstanbul: Amargi Kadın Bilimsel ve Kültürel Araştırmalar Yayıncılık Dayanışma Kooperatifi, 2005, p.216.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

problems in relation with each other derived from her being a Kurdish and homosexual woman since she experiences her womanhood and homosexuality simultaneously but not separately.

Zozan Özgökçe, a feminist activist, also assesses Kurdishness as the first and prior base that motivated Kurdish women to organize but defends similarly to previous arguments made above that a separate woman consciousness was constituted in the course of movement.<sup>93</sup> Further some women decided to leave the political struggle and continue in the area of independent women studies. Through these studies they resisted against the standardization attempts of both Turkish and Kurdish sides on Kurdish women. Özgökçe mentioned the difficulties faced by Kurdish women who chose to be involved in independent studies that they have to encounter Kurdish politicians due to their criticism of the current position of Kurdish women in the movement. The main problem independent women associations face especially in the Southeast region, according to Özgökçe, is to become a target to and to be interpreted as traitors by Kurdish politicians.<sup>94</sup> It is argued that the image of empowered Kurdish women was not as welcomed as the passive image of Kurdish women who give support to the Kurdish movement by shouting slogans during the demonstrations. Depending on these accounts it could be claimed that the extent of democratization experienced within the movement through the partial normalization of the social relations between men and women which was based on strict rules laid down by the society and escalation of women's position from dangerous sexual objects to potential comrades did not reach the approaches towards independent

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<sup>93</sup> Zozan Özgökçe, "Bağımsız Kürt Kadın Örgütlenmelerine Karşı Politik Hazımsızlık," Qijika Reş, accessed May 20, 2011, <http://qijikares.blogspot.com/2011/02/bagmsz-kurt-kadn-orgutlenmelerine-kars.html>

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

associations of Kurdish women. On the other hand it has to be reminded that Zozan is known with her critical stance against the Kurdish movement and there are a lot of women who choose to act in mixed groups (male-female together) or in women groups which act separately but in solidarity with Kurdish movement and they view males as their partners in the general struggle against oppressive acts of the state. The closeness of some women groups to the Kurdish movement is also problematized by some feminists particularly when it is perceived as in clash with the interests of the women. The areas of clash will be elaborated later in the following parts of the study across the practices that took place within the women's movement since the clash experienced is not essential and inherent but arises more over the cases. Another important point to remember is that it is not possible to talk about homogenous groups such as groups of Kurdish women or feminists since there are Kurdish women acting in groups that define themselves as feminist and there are feminists acting in the mixed groups struggling in favor of Kurdish movement. Therefore these positions should not be treated as identity based but as constructions with concerns, interests and politics in themselves.

### Interactions

Sharing Sirman's views that the movement in post 1980 area positioned among other non-formal oppositional movements, Arat shows over the feminist journal Pazartesi, how introduction of women's issues to public agenda expanded the meaning of political and added a different perspective to dominant political controversies like Islamism and Kurdish issues. Pazartesi is aware of the heterogeneity of women in local context and the range of issues varies depending on this heterogeneous localities. (Considering the political context of 1990s), the rise of Islamist and Kurdish groups found its place in women's agenda and Pazartesi was sensitive to

reflect the decisions and concerns of the women from these groups without taking a certain attitude, despite Arat says it has its own feminist perspective. It was also possible to find secularist criticisms against the arguments developed in favor of for instance the abolition of ban on headscarf by the authors of the journal. Even an editorial was issued to explain why the authors chose to act in solidarity with Islamist women on headscarf issue with a focus on common subordination. ‘Pazartesi thus became a medium through which a coalition of women with different religious, ethnic, or ideological backgrounds could come together and express political discontent.’<sup>95</sup> The journal assumed a liberal stance by coding/formulating the use of headscarf as a woman’s right to get dressed as they will or a right to self expression keeping on the other hand the potential threat in their mind of a conservative political party or a powerful Islamist movement may pose to women, such as Welfare party at the time journal was being published.

On the other hand İlkaracan evaluates the rise of Islamist right since 1980s, especially the electoral success of Welfare Party in 1994 local elections and 1995 general elections as a turning point for the feminist movement. Women shelters, women counseling centers were closed and the politically chaotic atmosphere after the electoral victory of Welfare Party caused a loss their interest over new feminist movement which was dealing with violations of woman rights in private sphere. The atmosphere was tense due to the ‘threat’ of fundamentalist Islam and this deepened the division between ‘Kemalist feminists’ who embrace the role to protect the basic

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<sup>95</sup> Gül Çorbacıoğlu, Feminist discussions on the headscarf problem in Turkey: Examination of three women’s journals; feminist yaklaşımlar, Kadın Çalışmaları Dergisi, Amargi (Master’s Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2008).

principles of the Turkish Republic and radical feminists.<sup>96</sup> It differentiated veiling and the right to veil. On the Kurdish issue, they were opposed to a solution via violent ways and specifically they disclose the cases of physical violence, torture and rape committed against Kurdish women.

### Contemporary Agenda of the Feminist Movement

Being of the opinion that different women organizations have been able to cooperate on platforms around specific issues, even though the result is not always success, two authors Coşar and Onbaşı foresee a potential for the development of a common feminist political understanding and make a research with six different women organizations which have divergent ideological viewpoints to investigate the possibility of such an occurrence.<sup>97</sup> Their understanding of politics, democracy, civil society, state; their perception of feminism; reflections of their ideological positions to cooperation with other women groups are questioned. They are looking forward to find solutions to problems crosscutting the women's movement such as headscarf issue that the dominant political discourses failed to solve. However while the organizations in the sample are in agreement on domestic violence campaigns and legal amendments, headscarf keeps being a confrontational issue. Only the Islamist woman organization "Capital Woman Platform" (Başkent Kadın Platformu) among others does not see veiling as a woman rights violation. Kurdish question and EU

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<sup>96</sup> Pınar Ilkcaracan, "Türkiye'de Kadın Hareketleri ve Feminizm." In *Toplumsal Hareketler Konuşuyor*, edited by Leyla Sanlı (İstanbul: Alan Yayıncılık, 2003), pp.169-177.

<sup>97</sup> Simten Coşar and Funda Gençoğlu Onbaşı, "Women's Movement in Turkey at a Crossroads: From Women's Rights Advocacy to Feminism," *South European Society & politics* 13, no.3, (September 2008), pp.325-344. Turkish Penal Code and Civil Code Platforms are examples of success ended with necessary, demanded amendments through the participation of various women organizations. WROs in the sample: Uçan Süpürge; Cumhuriyet Kadınları Derneği; Başkent Kadın Platformu; Ezilen Kadınlar Birliği; Ka-Der and Kadın Dayanışma Vakfı.

accession process are other issue-areas that organizations displayed different positions.<sup>98</sup> Even though authors claim feminism is integral to women's rights activism and they anticipate a shared feminist political framework at some point in the near future of the movement, they accept that feminist stance could not be imported but arise from the particular experiences of women. Nevertheless the authors do not make clear the content of the concepts 'feminist political understanding' or 'feminist political stance' to which many feminists may approach hesitant since it necessitates to make definite and general descriptions while discussions in the feminist literature focusing on differences among women along with questioning the legitimacy/possibility of a universal feminism. For instance as a woman activist in 1980s, Ayşe Düzkan argues that feminist movement lacks an international character; it exists everywhere but takes different forms and according to her this may appear both as an advantage and an obstruct.<sup>99</sup> As an advantage, it does not force women to constitute a homogenized group to be able to organize around the case of common oppression of women. From this perspective, feminism is an opportunity to act together without having to ignore differences. The question keeps it up however; what kind of politics shall be pursued while attending differences if feminism would be a political mediation to bring women together within the movement. Searching for the possibility of such feminist politics, Düzkan proposes that feminism is not a total politics and not obliged to act in totality, it may proceed through campaigns and women participating to the campaigns may come from different associations.<sup>100</sup> She thinks institutionalization is not indispensable if and when women come together to serve a purpose and leave when they're

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p.359.

<sup>99</sup> Meltem Ahıska and Ayşe Düzkan, "80'li Yıllarda Türkiye'de Feminizm," *Defter* 21, (1994).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p.150

convinced that they have accomplished the task. For instance Mor Çatı as an outcome of the successful feminist campaigns was established in 1989 and aimed to struggle violence against women, but many women attending protests of sexual abuse have been out of Mor Çatı members.

It is a handicap that, Düzkan thinks, the initiators of the woman's movement have been intellectuals, leftists or former-leftists and brought false notion of 'we are all same' that is borrowed from socialism to the movement. The situation on the ground was different however, says author, women differ depending on their economic status, intellectuality, marital status. Some women speak more comfortably and competent like women academicians.<sup>101</sup> To speak up their life experiences for women is a good way to create a consciousness that may evolve into feminism, and since they experience their lives differently due to their positions in society says Düzkan, a total feminist politics including all women is not practicable.<sup>102</sup> Second wave of feminism in the West has disclosed the male-centeredness of theories and enlightenment that established and universalized itself excluding female characteristics as embodied in the polarization of public and private spheres formed as belonging to respectively males and females.

Inquiring into universality claims has paved the way for feminist epistemological studies in general and postmodernism discussion that is applicable to practice feminism in particular.<sup>103</sup> Savran argues, there is nothing other than criticism and exposition in discursive deconstructions and they have only indirect political effects. Savran also criticizes herself as an activist in 1980s that despite her attempts

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p.152

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p.149

<sup>103</sup> Gülnur Savran, "Feminizmin İkilemleri (Teoride Aşılabilir mi?)," *DeFTER* 44, (Yaz 2001) .

to incorporate differences among women into theory; in practice she had been prone to identify a woman's liberation movement ignorant to differences. One reason for this tendency was derived from her endeavor to differentiate feminist politics from other social movements, especially socialist movement. It was Kurdish feminists' criticisms, she says, that made her sensitive to these kinds of differences. She argues that what prevents to make feminist politics is not the existence of differences but the hierarchies. A collective subject is necessary to mobilize struggle against gender oppression but any definition attempt risks to exclude some women. The oppression they face for being women inevitably intertwines with other elements such as class, race and gender.

In the same journal Zelal Ayman analyzes the issue of coexisting with differences in the context of contemporary women's movement in Turkey, being in the opinion that the movement is too inflexible to embrace the existence and activities of different women. In her description of 'woman's movement', every agency is legitimate as long as they make an endeavor for women. She attempts to explain the current situation from within the dynamics of such a movement. The movement in 1980s was successful to bring domestic violence to the agenda and problematize it but insufficient to link with other kinds of violence such as economic violence, violence against homosexuals and/or Kurdish women and this left the movement vulnerable to nationalist and statist cleavages. Another shortcoming derives from the interpretations of the 'personal is political' in various ways to the extent of legitimizing all personal ideas about feminism, which has actually its own basic principles and values like other ideologies.<sup>104</sup> Third criticism is the conservativeness of feminists to reflect their stance towards individual liberalization

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<sup>104</sup> Zelal Ayman, "Neredeydik, Nereye Geldik?," *Amargi*, no:3, (winter 2006), p.9.

and emancipation to their own lives. Lastly she criticizes the tendency to act as if the women are a homogeneous group without paying attention to ethnic and class differences for the sake of becoming partners. Then posing some questions she tries to form the principles feminism should have such as questioning the discrimination sources derived from class, ethnicity, race, religion, language, nation, age. The author appreciates cooperation among women but with paying attention not to come to the point of denying differences: “We have directed ourselves to the partnership so much that maybe we ought to take another turn fearlessly to the process of resetting and discovering and destroying what we have denied if it has been this difficult to even express our differences embedding them into our policies is put aside.”<sup>105</sup>

In an 8 March symposium organized by a political party this year, Serpil Sancar mentioned similar concerns in her talk. She acknowledged the contributions of Kurdish and Islamist women to the movement but at the same time remark to possible drawbacks. Along with the participation of Islamist women, she says, ‘covering’ has become a less debate issue even sometimes not to hurt anyone. In another article Sancar deepens the discussion and looks for the effects of cooperation partners in the development of feminism. She thinks the fact that feminism in Europe and/or North Atlantic developed concomitantly with the radical movement of 68 makes them different from Turkey’s experience, where feminism spread in a political atmosphere in absence of emancipatory, radical movements following the coup. Cooperation of green and leftist movements with feminist movement in Europe and North Atlantic countries contributed to realization of gender equality policies. Quota policies have been an outcome of such cooperation whereas in Turkey feminist

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p.9. “Çubuğu o kadar çok ortaklık yönünde çevirdik ki, artık farklılıklarımızı değil politikalarımıza yedirmek, ifade etmek bile bu kadar zor hale geldiyse, belki bir şeyleri sıfırlayıp, cesaretle neyi inkar ettiğimizi keşfetme ve ortadan kaldırma sürecine korkusuzca girmeliyiz.”

movement did not have radical partners, they found only Islamist woman associations to cooperate.<sup>106</sup>

‘We Are Looking After Each Other’ is such an initiative showing the cooperation of covered and uncovered women over the issue of headscarf bans. Savran indicates her hesitations to turn feminism into identity politics composed of coalition groups by freezing differences/separations as ‘identities’ in the absence of an examination of power structures that establish those identities and she criticizes the platform from this viewpoint. The rejection of the use of body as a domination area even when it is covered or not as declared by the platform has crucial importance to show the changeability of women’s relations with ideological identities, Savran says. Yet she argues BSC froze differences in order to make politics along with differences. Religious and secular control over women body is not symmetrical according to Savran. The dialogue should be developed without freezing/presupposing being covered and be examined in an interrogatory way rather than establishing parallelisms with covered and uncovered body.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Akis, Yasemin and Ülkü Özakın. 16 May 2009. *Türkiye’de Feminizm ve Kadın Hareketi*, Available [online]: “<http://bianet.org/bianet/biamag/114551-turkiyede-feminizm-ve-kadin-hareketi>” [16 May 2009]

<sup>107</sup> Gülnur Savran, “Kimlik Politikası, Kadın Dayanışması, Toplumsal Cinsiyet,” *Feminist Politika*, no:1 (Winter 2009), pp.18-19.

## CHAPTER III

### DISCUSSIONS ON FAMILY, SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND THE HEADSCARF WITHIN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN TURKEY

Discussion on Family over the Call for Three Children by Prime Minister Erdoğan

#### Women's Struggle for Reproductive Rights

The first wave feminist movement in the West, particularly in the United Kingdom and United States, intended to bring women to an equal status to that of men in public sphere through taking education and work, the absence of which were believed to be the cause of the inferior position of women.<sup>108</sup> Another struggle within first wave was for the right to vote. All of these struggles due to their claim to equal social and political rights, namely the equality of opportunity, were defined as part of liberal feminism. Based on radical feminism however, the second wave feminist movement in late 1960s which had as its motto 'the personal is political' and which problematized the public/private division, began to examine the oppressive relations in the private sphere. Instead of the abstract individual of liberal theory that is grounded on the sameness principle, radical feminism took the body as the source of women's difference and oppression.<sup>109</sup> Thus, the dynamics of relations within the family and sexual relations were brought under scrutiny which was followed by the criticism of family as an institution and the rejection of traditional roles. Women

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<sup>108</sup> Chris Weedon, *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference* (London: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2003), pp.10-13.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.13-16.

were called to resist against any type of organization since that the patriarchy is an all-pervading oppression: ‘Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men- by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor- determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.’<sup>110</sup> Radical feminism determined three basic areas with regards to control of the woman’s body by the elements of patriarchy: “sexuality, procreative power and labour”. Moreover the spheres of “reproduction, marriage, compulsory heterosexuality, and motherhood” were determined as the primary sites of attack.<sup>111</sup> Following these determinations, abortion emerged as the most pronounced issue from consciousness raising meetings in which women were discussing the critical areas of exercise of male power over women.<sup>112</sup> They found out that they had bad stories of abortion either they themselves had experienced or had heard about. The fact that abortion was not yet legalized by the laws until 1970s did not completely prevent them from taking place. Yet women had to get these surgeries, suffering from unhealthy conditions and the risk of mortality.

Throughout the struggle for legalization of abortion feminists for a while framed their demands from within a rights discourse on abortion particularly and on reproductive rights generally by claiming the right of women to control their own bodies. Yet to frame such a right on the grounds of ‘choice’, a concept which implies privacy and autonomy over a decision, ran the risk of leaving the societal and

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p.20.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., pp.26-30.

<sup>112</sup> Jennifer Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement*, (New York: NYU Press, 2003), accessed September 20, 2011, Netlibrary e-book, p.3.

political factors over reproductivity unexamined.<sup>113</sup> By reducing the choice to an individual matter the role of men with regards to unwanted pregnancy could become overlooked. Thus it may weaken the women's hand while negotiating with the state their demands to access to birth control mechanisms and abortions. On the other hand inclusion of the rights of the foetus and fathers to the debate turned the issue to the disadvantage of women when the debate was limited to rights discourse. Then the discourse used by feminists, which focused on the individual rights of women was carried to a broader context of reproductive rights. The integrity of the body is settled as an important element of this formulation suggesting that it would give damage to a woman to know that her body is under the control of others who intervene in the relation between a woman and her womb.<sup>114</sup> Behind the struggles of feminists to attain reproductive rights and to establish a discourse in compliance with both principles of feminism and to the principles of the laws through this end, there were different actors intervening in the debate with diverse interests.

The issue becomes more complex when the interests of states and diverse groups of women pertaining to different ethnicities, religions, and classes are included. The intertwining of different types of oppression based on gender, class and ethnicities makes the issue more vulnerable considering the appropriation of women's rights discourses by other discourses to realize their own aims and projects. On the other hand doctors and physicians also argued in favor of legalizing abortion due to the unhealthy conditions that may give damage to women but in this argument health was prioritized rather than the women's interests. Then feminists decided that women have to be the subjects of such a movement to be able to defend it in

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<sup>113</sup> Lisa Smyth, "Feminism and abortion politics: Choice, rights, and reproductive freedom," *Women's Studies International Forum* 25, no:3 (May-June 2002), pp.335-345.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

compliance with feminist perspectives on woman's body and reproductivity and thus separate it from other discourses. Moreover, a second reason for women's undertakae of the struggle, the rights could be in danger of being taken back when they were given by the state or any actor other than women.<sup>115</sup> Thus to formulate this demand in compliance with women's interests and demands was as important as obtaining the legal right to abortion in order to prevent the main inequalities arising from this issue to the detriment of women.

Turning to criticisms of different groups of women, singling out the abortion issue from within reproductive rights by second wave feminists received criticisms from women of color at the end of 1970s due to the second wave feminists' ignorance of their particular conditions and experiences. What is outstanding in the complaints of women of color was their inability to achieve sufficient conditions to have and raise babies safely. They argued that reproductive rights had to be expanded to include not only the right to have an abortion but also to achieve the necessary social and economic conditions to have as many children as women want. Another problematic area for the women of color had been sterilization operations made without the knowledge of women but through the persuasion of health care providers as part of eugenic policies that the poor and black women are incapable of deciding over their fertility.<sup>116</sup> To establish a direct relation between access to birth control and women's liberation led at least one author to interpret the high numbers of sterilization operations held by Puerto Rican women in New York as emancipatory overlooking the racist dimensions of state policies. Even she defined

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<sup>115</sup> Socialist Feminist Collective, "İstedğimiz Zaman, İstedğimiz Kadar Çocuk," *Feminist Politika*, no:7 (Summer 2010), pp.22-23.

<sup>116</sup> Nelson, pp.4-5.

it as a strategy of women to encounter the pressures from Catholic regulations and limitations to access abortion.<sup>117</sup> Therefore it is important to look at the context to be able to better understand and interpret the different dimensions of the issue.

These stories have parallels with what Kurdish women experienced in Turkey, including forced sterilization stories of women and encouragement of birth control by the state in specific regions populated by Kurdish people. The crucial point here is the appropriation of women's rights discourse by different discourses in line with their predetermined aims. State's support to activities of civil society organizations in Southeast region is approached with suspicion by Kurdish people to the extent of accusing the state with genocide corresponding to birth control promotions. Kutluata in one part of her thesis tries to find out how Kurdish women articulate their decisions about birth control policies and how they position themselves vis a vis Kurdish nationalist men and feminist women by analyzing the articles from four different Kurdish women/feminist journals.<sup>118</sup> More specifically in order to discuss different perspectives on birth control policies she puts Multi-Purpose Centers at the center of the debate.<sup>119</sup> Multi-Purpose Centers are state supported centers that were established in 1995 to improve social and economic conditions in the region with the main motivation of raising it to a modernized level. In addition to the skill courses provided to the women in the region, the centers also worked on convincing women to decrease the number of the childbirths, to learn Turkish, to teach their children Turkish and to take their headscarves off.<sup>120</sup> In the

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>118</sup> Zeynep Kutluata, *The Politics of Difference Within the Feminist Movement as Manifested in the case of Kurdish Women/Feminist Journals* (Master's Thesis, Bosphorus University, 2003).

<sup>119</sup> Turkish abbreviation for Multipurpose Center is ÇATOM.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p.68.

Kurdish journals Kutluata analyzes most of the women interpreted the activities of ÇATOMs as ethnically assimilative. They questioned the kind of woman ÇATOM is aiming to create and to what extent this image targets to distort the ethnic identity of Kurdish women. In the Kurdish women/feminist journals there is a general tendency to oppose the birth control policies (of the Multipurpose Centers) yet they differentiate in their articulations of the reasons for their opposition. ‘Yaşamda Özgür Kadın’ determined Turkish state and Kurdish people as responsible parties of the debate on birth control. Roza and Jujin viewed it as appropriation of women’s issues by state policies and thus took it as part of state feminism.<sup>121</sup> The stipulated aims of the ÇATOMs were also approached with suspicion looking from this perspective that efforts to prompt women to act in public sphere and raising consciousness are merely tools but not ends in themselves.

Feminist women who wrote to these journals found the contributions of ÇATOMs to women’s lives in the region useful in terms of learning Turkish and acquiring skills to get jobs. Nevertheless the creation of a hierarchical position between teachers and learners and/or between ‘we’-as the saviors- and ‘them’ was exposed to criticisms. Yet a feminist visitor to those centers mentioned the women’s high levels of satisfaction in these institutions contrary to the generally heard criticisms about them. In the last stance, focusing on women’s agency, the feminist author prefers to leave the decision to work with these institutions and to use birth control techniques up to Kurdish women. It is not different from each other, she says, to tell Kurdish women either to go or not to go to these institutions as prescribed by

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pp.70-85.

Turkish side or Kurdish side respectively since it recreates a teacher/learner hierarchy.<sup>122</sup>

In some articles Kurdish women accused feminists with prioritizing their concerns over the maintenance of traditional roles of women compared to racist population policies of the state. It is a discussion that shows the complexity of the case situated at the intersection of different types of oppression. As the women of color reminded white women of the different dimensions of reproductive rights in the Western experience, Kurdish women revealed the racism immanent in the population control policies and programmes made in the name of women's health. When statesmen make a call to have more children, its target community is already defined: the people who belong to the hegemonic nation and come from the middle classes.<sup>123</sup> Thus such a call by the authorities of the state is not separate from capitalism, nationalism, militarism and patriarchy. Yet the point they become partners is the control and authority they reclaim over women's reproductivity, sexuality and bodies. On the other hand the focus of the struggle given for sexual rights and the meaning of abortion may change due to the diversifying experiences of women in the society.

For the part of Muslim women, it is not easy to find a document that is directly written on their decisions about reproductivity or abortion. To find out their approaches however, looking at the writings on family and children helps to understand their position over women's sexuality, reproductivity and abortion. Firstly there is not a clear and direct statement about abortion in the Quran, and thus

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp.72-73.

<sup>123</sup> Ayşe Toksöz, "Erkek egemenliği, kapitalizm ve doğurganlığın kontrolü," *Feminist Politika*, no:7 (Summer 2010), p.30.

to determine the appropriate position on abortion Muslims apply to verses commenting on the value of human life and children. In various websites that explain the rules of Islam through the sections of questions and answers, abortion is completely rejected by equalizing it with murder whereas in some sites it is portrayed as permissible until the time God gives a soul to foetus and the duration of this period changes in different sources.<sup>124</sup> There is a verse in the Quran on the basis of which abortion is found sinful; the verse comments on cases in which economic conditions are an issue of concern for parents to raise a child: “Kill not your children for fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin.”<sup>125</sup> It is possible to observe the reflections of this religious commandment in the widespread belief of the people in Turkey that “God grants the child, so would he grant its bread.”<sup>126</sup>

While searching on sexuality in Muslim societies, covering should also be investigated in terms of its relation to sexuality. Mernissi argues that female sexuality is perceived as active in societies where women’s existence in society is bounded by certain rules of matters and clothing.<sup>127</sup> According to Mernissi women’s sexuality is perceived as a threat since their sexual power and capacity to seduce is much higher

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<sup>124</sup> “Kürtaj yaptırmak caiz midir?” Sorularla İslamiyet, accessed September 20, 2011, <http://www.sorularlaislamiyet.com/qna/749/kurtaj-yaptirmak-caiz-midir>.

<sup>125</sup> “Kürtaj,” İslamda Kadın ve Erkek, accessed September 20, 2011, [http://www.islamiyet.gen.tr/islamda\\_kadin\\_ve\\_erkek/kurtaj.php](http://www.islamiyet.gen.tr/islamda_kadin_ve_erkek/kurtaj.php). “Çocuklarınızı fakirlik korkusuyla öldürmeyin. Onları da sizi de biz rızıklandırırız. Onları öldürmek gerçekten büyük bir günahdır.”

<sup>126</sup> In Turkish: “Çocuğu veren Allah rızkını da verir.”

<sup>127</sup> Mernissi, Fatima. “The Muslim Concept of Active Female Sexuality.” In *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies*, edited by Pinar İlkkaracan (İstanbul, Turkey : Women for Women's Human Rigths, 2000).

than men. The prevention of ‘fitna’<sup>128</sup> in the society is presented as the main motivation to charge women with covering themselves. Therefore, according to this explanation, women do have more control over their sexual temptations than men. It is followed by an argumentation that since men are less able to control their temptations, it is women who have to cover themselves. By this explanation she explains the logic behind the covering with the sexual power of the women but not with their being inferior to men. Even though such elaboration of the practice of covering makes a reference to women’s power, it was found inconvenient by feminists that it reconstructs women as sexual objects.

Mustafa Tekin in his dissertation interviews intellectual women to find out their decisions about religion and women. Among his sample there are also Islamist intellectual women and it is possible to learn about their approaches to sexuality from the chapter the author asks them about women’s freedom.<sup>129</sup> At the beginning the author criticizes the modernist understanding of woman’s freedom as it developed in contradiction with religion. As against the traditional discourses of freedom that emphasizes spirituality and even physical asceticism, the body is prioritized in new discourses as is in the fields of feminism, fashion and sexuality.<sup>130</sup> In fact feminists are also against objectification of female body by the media and the polarized creation of female prototypes as free, sexually available woman on one side and woman as good wife and/or self-sacrificing mother on the other. Nevertheless despite the rejection of putting sexuality before personality by feminists the emancipation of female sexuality still has significance in feminist discourse. Islamist intellectual

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<sup>128</sup> Fitnah is defined as ‘trials or temptations that test the unity of the Muslim community.’ *Encyclopedia2*, s.v., “fitnah.”

<sup>129</sup> Mustafa Tekin, *Kutsal, Kadın ve Kamu* (İstanbul: Açılım Kitap, 2004).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p.268

Cihan Aktaş finds the interpretations that treat women as potential sources of fitna inconvenient to Islam and views sexuality as a basic instinct of both Muslim men and women on an equal basis. She criticizes the attitudes that draw parallelisms between the freedom of woman and sexual freedom she thinks help to materialize women by restricting women's existence to their sexual identity. She argues that treatment of woman body increasingly as a sexual object led many young women to cover themselves. According to Aktaş, liberation is possible through believing in a religion. She disagrees with feminism's broader definition of women's freedom which she believes goes to the point of exploiting women. She argues that self-actualization of a woman is possible in the areas that are specific to women such as their potential for motherhood. Therefore, in motherhood there lies the potential to reach freedom from the perspective of Aktaş.

All other Islamist intellectual women are in agreement that sexual needs are natural and should be met through legal ways (helal) and the legal way for sexual intercourse is marriage.<sup>131</sup> One of the Islamist intellectuals Yıldız Ramazanoğlu talks about the necessity to establish a balance between sexuality and covering since she believes it has greatly damaged Islamic communities to have an exaggerated understanding of sexuality. This understanding forced women to remain passive and deprived them of daily life. Another Islamist intellectual woman Hidayet Tuksal who at the same time identifies herself as feminist problematizes a perception of sexuality that imposes restrictions on women whereas it provides opportunities and alternatives to men.

In the part of the book that deals with the status of women, the intellectual women were asked about their decisions on women's place in the family and

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp.240-267.

polygamy. It can be derived from the interviews with Islamist intellectual women that equality is not an issue between husband and wife according to their understanding of family. Justice is said to be the necessary ground while establishing healthy relations within the family. The husband's roles to be the manager of the house and to look after the family are embraced by the Islamist women intellectuals to the extent that the husband does not turn it to a domination tool over other members of the family. That manager position is interpreted as more about responsibilities rather than privileges by these women. Motherhood is given such an importance that Aktaş argues it is a way to realize one's existence yet despite this nearly sanctual approach to motherhood, to limit women merely with being mother is found as unacceptable by her. She thinks women should also realize themselves in the areas they think they would be useful. Yet those areas should target to at the end serve religion. The choice of not giving birth to a child is also tolerated by Aktaş unless the person thinks other merits she is planning to develop would bring more benefit to Islam. Having these different perspectives on the issues of reproductivity, motherhood and family in the background, now the discussion will be conducted on a specific case in support of the interviews held with women activists.

#### Three Children Advice to Turkish Women from Prime Minister Erdoğan

On March 7, 2008 Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan attended a panel in Uşak that was arranged to celebrate International Women's Day and in his speech he advised women to give birth to at least three children. Giving statistical information Erdoğan warned that about 60 percent of the Turkish population will be 65 or older in 2037 if the growth rates remain the same. He says it is a huge problem that the West is suffering from, referring to Germany's former president Schröder's announcement about importing a younger population to European Union. In order to

alleviate the material concerns of families in giving birth to more children Erdoğan also uses a traditional and religious discourse that every child is born with its luck.<sup>132</sup> He mentions his life as a proof of this that he was born to a moderate family and he sold water and simit to earn money during his childhood implying that other children could also achieve high statuses irrespective of their families' economic conditions.<sup>133</sup> Moreover, in his speech, Erdoğan claimed that, historically there have been many attempts to kill of the Turkish population Turkish population and it still nevertheless continues but he did not mention who the attempters were and did not give reasons for his argument. During the course of the debates, the ninth president of Turkey Süleyman Demirel intervened in the debate and this provided an opportunity to understand the reason behind it. Demirel argued that people should have the number of children that they can afford and added that most of the problems Turkey faces with result from high rates of population.<sup>134</sup> In response Erdoğan insisted on his argument that three children per family is necessary for the future well being of the country and a person who wants the continuation of the Turkish nation and its power would not resist it.<sup>135</sup> These emphases on the Turkish nation paved the way to link 3 children discourse with increasing rate of Kurdish population as can be apparent in some of the interviewees' views over the issue.

In the same speech the existence of references to the improvements in the work conditions of women such as maternity leaves seem to give messages to the

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<sup>132</sup> In Turkish: "Her çocuk bereketiyle doğar."

<sup>133</sup> "Erdoğan'dan kadınlara 'doğurun' çağrısı," Cnnturk, accessed September 20, 2011, <http://www.cnnturk.com/2008/turkiye/03/07/erdogandan.kadinlara.dogurun.cagrısı/435627.0/index.html>.

<sup>134</sup> "3 çocuk' tartışması sürüyor," Medya01, accessed September 20, 2011, <http://www.medya01.com/?mod=haber&id=2070>.

<sup>135</sup> "Trabzon Gençlik Kolları 2. Olağan Kongresi," Akparti, accessed September 20, 2011, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/ak-parti-genel-baskani-ve-basbakan-erdogan-trabzon-genclik-kollari-2-olagan/6221>.

women that giving birth will not force them to leave their jobs. In another account he may be trying to prove that his advice is not derived from the demand to confine women to their homes. He emphasized the importance of equal wages in jobs and health insurances that shows on the surface that he is not against women's working and against exploitation of women labor. Being a conservative party they attend to their discourses on women's working in order to alleviate possible criticism since male members of AKP are known to be traditional and to not support the employment of women. However it is not completely an ungrounded or prejudiced criticism considering State Minister Babacan's statements given in 2003 that since the financial crisis in Turkey has passed women would not have to work.<sup>136</sup> This statement made by a high-status government member, a rather different figure from other traditional men with his educational background and appearance, signifies a mentality that views women's working outside of home just as a result of necessity but not free will. It is possible to find traditional connotations in this inference that if women had the opportunity they would prefer to stay at home and look after their children and it establishes an essential link between women and family. However, Ayşe Buğra says after three years since Babacan's statements, even though there are still people with the same mentality in the government they could not explicitly apply to this discourse due to European Union accession process within which low rates of female employment in Turkey has been criticized.<sup>137</sup>

Zeynep Gambetti argues that not only conservatism but also neoliberalism is included in AKP's discourse and actions. The suggestion of three children and the

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<sup>136</sup> "Babacan'dan kadınlara müjde: Evde oturacaksınız!..." Hürriyet, accessed September 20, 2011, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=192299&p=2>.

<sup>137</sup> "Buğra: Kadınlar İş Piyasasının Dışındalar," Bianet, accessed September 20, 2011, <http://bianet.org/biamag/bianet/84098-bugra-kadinlar-is-piyasasinin-disindalar>.

emphasis put on a woman's difference from man rather than their equality being signals of AKP's conservatism on one hand, there are also measures taken in advantage of women such as extending the period of time for maternal leave and providing opportunities to employers in recruitment of women workers on the other.<sup>138</sup> Gambetti establishes a similarity between Kemalist ideology and AKP's viewpoint in their instrumentalization of women. While the former demands from women to raise their children in accordance with contemporary values, the latter demands from women to give birth to at least three children due to market conditions. She also adds that this tendency is also observable in England and France, which subsidizes families having three children, and it presents evidence that conservatism may not be the only reason behind Erdoğan's demand.

Erdoğan repeated his expectation from families to have 3 children in various occasions and at least three of them were during wedding ceremonies to which Erdoğan attended as a witness to marriages.<sup>139</sup> He even mentioned the possibility of a prize to give families that have three children.<sup>140</sup> A feminist activist Filiz, also among the interviewees in this study, in her comment given to a news site evaluates Erdoğan's speech as indicator of AKP's conservative and nationalist mentality. In this mentality to look after children and to perpetuate the Turkish population are viewed as essential roles of women which restrict women's life opportunities: "Having four children Erdoğan could become president but Emine Erdoğan devoting her life to her four children could only become the Prime Minister's wife as her real

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<sup>138</sup> "Üç çocuk da, aile sigortası da kadını eve kapatır," *Birgün*, accessed September 20, 2011, [http://www.birgun.net/politics\\_index.php?news\\_code=1301995195&day=05&month=04&year=2011](http://www.birgun.net/politics_index.php?news_code=1301995195&day=05&month=04&year=2011).

<sup>139</sup> *Hürriyet*, 27 December 2003; *Yeni Şafak*, 25 October 2010; *Ntvmsnbc*, 10 October 2009; *Bianet*, 6 April 2008.

<sup>140</sup> "3 çocuk yapana ödül verebiliriz," *Mynet*, accessed September 20, 2011, <http://haber.mynet.com/detay/guncel/3-cocuk-yapana-odul-verebiliriz/510272>

identity. But we desire women to be prime ministers.”<sup>141</sup> Bianet, a news portal known with its oppositional stance vis a vis central media, asks the views of women of different ages and jobs on this issue. In their responses, they mostly put an emphasis on nationalist and conservative connotations in this discourse and claim a full authority over their bodies.<sup>142</sup> Two women refer to the inappropriateness of the idea of having more children considering the absence of conditions to sufficiently raise a child. A retired woman worker tells resistance against wars and child deaths would rather be prioritized than prescribing to give birth to more children.

Ayten, among the interviewees of this study, firstly reacts that Erdoğan’s discourse is patriarchal concerning woman question and it is not surprising such a suggestion came from AKP as appropriate to its mentality. From the viewpoint of the Kurdish movement, she finds the discourse racist. But then her following sentence is indicative of confusion with regards to relations between racism and patriarchy: “However, if we step back and look from the Kurdish movement point of view, it is racist, not only patriarchal but also racist, racism is patriarchal anyway.”<sup>143</sup> The analysis in the sentence begins with handling racism and patriarchy as two separate institutions as sources of control mechanisms and ends with the assertion that patriarchy is hidden in racism. In her mind how racism and patriarchy relates with each other seems ambiguous but the second part of the sentence implies that she views it as an inclusive one rather than an intersecting one. Furthermore the way she

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<sup>141</sup> “Erdoğan Kadınları Dinlemiyor, "En Az Üç Yavru" Diye Tutturdu...,” Bianet, accessed September 20, 2011, <http://bianet.org/bianet/bianet/105970-erdogan-kadinlari-dinlemiyor-en-az-uc-yavru-diye-tutturdu>.

<sup>142</sup> “Çoğalmak Yerine Savaşlar Olmasın, Çocuklar Ölmesin...,” Bianet, accessed September 20, 2011, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/toplumsal-cinsiyet/105463-cogalmak-yerine-savaslar-olmasin-cocuklar-olmesin>.

<sup>143</sup> “Ama bu daha öncesine dönersek Kürt hareketinden doğru bakarsak ırkçıdır, tek başına ataerkil değildir, aynı zamanda ırkçıdır, gerçi ırkçı olan herşey de ataerkindir de.”

establishes the relation between racism and patriarchy gives an idea about the ambiguity in her articulation of Kurdish identity and woman identity. Ayten reminds throwing of condoms from helicopters in the Southeast region during Tansu Çiller's presidency in order to control the increase in the Kurdish population. Moreover she adds that along with the agency of ÇATOM<sup>144</sup> what they identified as women's problems was actually 'their' problem of preventing childbearing in the region. By establishing continuity between these attempts and discourse of Erdoğan she shows a distrust to state authorized projects. Turning to today, she says she finds it patriarchal to tell Turks to make three children. From a general overlook to Ayten's response it becomes apparent that even though she asserts patriarchy as integral to racism, in her analysis they are diagnosed separately with regards to different groups. She emphasizes racist tendencies of such discourses when she looks from the perspective of Kurdish people and emphasizes patriarchy looking from perspectives of Turkish people and more interestingly from perspective of the women: "Everybody evaluates an event from her own problem. In this respect, it is a very patriarchal discourse in terms of the woman problem."<sup>145</sup> This response seems to give the signs of a theoretical consciousness about the intertwining of two different axes of oppression, which has not reflected to the evaluation of practical cases yet. The sensitivity women show at least in the language by accounting different axes of women oppression may be indications of a more sensitive approach to show towards differences between women on the level of behavior.

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<sup>144</sup> Multi-Purpose Center of Society, established by regional development administration connected to Southeast Anatolian Project and aimed to improve women's conditions and integrate them to the development process in the region and first established in 1995 in Urfa. This institution was criticized being a tool of assimilation targeting Kurdish women by concentrating its activities on Turkish language courses and family planning.

<sup>145</sup> "Herkes kendi derdinden doğru değerlendirir ya olayı. Kadın sorununa ilişkin baktığında oldukça ataerkil bir söylem."

Leyla finds reactions to the Prime Minister's call for three children exaggerated. Articulating her viewpoint from an individualist perspective she says it is not Erdoğan's job to inculcate to a person to give birth at least three children. On the other hand she expresses population policies as existing in most of the countries as exist in Turkey thus she presents this data as a reason to tolerate such a discourse. Yet she said since she is not sure about what Erdoğan intended in making such a statement she could not assume a certain position and oscillates between approval for the sake of national interests and rejection taking it as a matter of privacy. In her response Leyla assumes an individualist stance that she has two children and won't give birth to the third one at the request of Erdoğan. She does not refer to women as a group at the target of Erdoğan's inculcation and does not articulate her opposition as a member of that group but assumes an individualist stance. As discussed in the first part of this issue to claim autonomy over the body in the context of reproductive rights has its own disadvantages one of which is to omit the responsibilities of other actors such as state and men in the process by seeing it only as the decision of a person. Mentioning that nobody has the right to call a person to give birth, Leyla stresses the priority of an individual's choice. Yet she does not problematize the choice, which may not be taken as autonomously as the concept of 'choice' itself implies. On the other hand it is important to remark that her comprehension of individual choice might well be different from the comprehension of feminist women who had been in reproductive rights movement. Those women rejected any authority while demanding individual choice but Leyla's claim to individual choice coexists with the approval of national concerns for the rate of Turkish population. Even though Leyla seems to give importance to choice she at the same time is on the border about tolerating the call for three children as long as it is part of state

population policies. Therefore she does not stand against such a demand of the state containing national concerns, but she also says she has two children and would not give birth to a third due to the will of the Prime Minister.

On the other hand, from the very beginning of the text in which the aims of the institution Leyla presides is explained, motherhood roles of the women are emphasized and they are deemed responsible from the construction of future. The importance of raising adults with national and moral values internalized is also mentioned in the text. Throughout the text references to child raising continue and women are advised to share the information with their children that they acquired from during the activities of the group. Thus the idea of women's development is dealt hand in hand with children's development in the text. It is not just womanhood that is defined in terms of responsibilities but to be alive is interpreted as a responsibility by itself with reference to religion. To increase the participation of women in social life, and to work on increasing the consciousness of participants with regards to women's rights are also ranked among the aims and plans of the association. To compare the discourses used in the text and the answer given during the interview on motherhood a shift is seen from a responsibility based description to a more liberal individualist stance with an emphasis made on choice.

Nermin at first interprets the call for three children as a typical role imposed over women by men without referring to the government party or Prime Minister. But then she suddenly begins to talk about the investments made on 'woman courses'- implying traditional occupations of women such as knitting- and there is a tendency to channel women to that traditional side. The idea of a free, enlightened woman is contrary to the nature of the party according to her. The jump between issues of three children and contradiction of traditional woman courses to idea of an

enlightened woman denotes a correlation established between having three or more children and being a traditional woman. This approach ignores the possible emancipatory effects of such courses and designates particular practices to be made in the public sphere to become free and enlightened women. The correlation established between having more than three children and traditionalism also derives from a modernist perception. Therefore the elaboration of her general argument that it is a role imposed on women by men remains restricted to the men of AKP. On the other hand Nebahat believes that Erdoğan's imposition is related with the desire of an increase in the number of Muslims in the course of establishing a religious community. Therefore she does not consider it as part of a nationalist population policy.

Filiz announces her complete opposition against the call for three children due to its nationalist and patriarchal connotations. According to Filiz due to the concern to balance the population increase proportion between Turkish population and Kurdish population in the Southeast region the discourse is nationalist. Second, she thinks it is an intervention of the state in women's body by the designation of 'giving birth' as the primary function of women.<sup>146</sup> The feminist collective of which Filiz is a member engages in dialogue with Kurdish women and attaches importance to cooperation with them as long as it is remarked in the introductory text that defines their feminism perspective in the first issue of the group's journal.<sup>147</sup>

Inclusion of the Kurdish issue in Filiz's comment on population policies and

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<sup>146</sup> The reaction against Prime Minister's call for 3 children was formulated as a slogan that has been used in multiple campaigns by Socialist Feminist Collective: 'Bana bak başbakan, tepemizi attırma/Kendin yat kuluçkaya/ Bir Türkçük İki Türkçük Üç Türkçük doğurmaya'

<sup>147</sup> The reader may look at the journal 'Feminist Politics', quarterly publication of Socialist Feminist Collective, in order to have a general idea of the relationship established with the situation of Kurdish women in the context of an ongoing war. Some examples are: Candan Yıldız, "Peace Politics and Feminism," no:1 (Winter 2009),p.15. Tülay Özdemir, "Militarizm, Tecavüz ve Kürtaj...", no:7 (Summer 2010), pp.31-32.

Erdoğan's discourse may derive from this concern for dealing with Kurdish women and the belief in reformulating feminist theory and feminist politics through this interaction. On the other hand in the comments of Ayten and Filiz there is a difference in wording to signify the 'hidden' concern of increasing Kurdish population in Erdoğan's appeal: Ayten prefers to use racism while Filiz prefers nationalism. Moreover Ayten handles racism and patriarchy in comparison even though in an ambiguous manner while Filiz evaluates nationalism and patriarchy in separately. This situation need not to have a particular meaning but a possible interpretation may be as such: Ayten as a Kurdish woman whose feminist stance is being questioned repeatedly in different events learned from her interactions with feminists to establish connections between racism and patriarchy since there is always the danger of being accused of making Kurdish nationalism for Kurdish women within the women's movement that Filiz as a feminist does not need to prove.

Ayten finds the discourse racist. Yet the speech Erdoğan made was mainly framed around economic concerns with references to the ageing population of European countries and to the need to an economically active population for Turkey in the coming years. It is an all agreed fact that the speech of a politician should not be conceived in a limited manner through its first connotations but there is rarely evidence in the ongoing discussions to be able to interpret the speech as a reaction to a continuous increase in the Kurdish population. The tendency to handle the discourse as an instance of racism may derive from a formerly constituted awareness to nationalist population policies conducted over the Southeast region through promotion of birth control methods. This first hand experience probably has a more

influential effect in determining her position towards the issue rather than the content.

The influence of ideological and political stances as well as experiences also determines the positions of the other interviewees vis a vis the issue. Nermin depending on traditional/modern dichotomy views the call for three children as an imposition of a traditional woman image as positioned against an enlightened, independent woman. Nebahat relates the issue with concerns to grow the number of Muslim ummah but not Turkish nationals. Leyla assumes an individualist stance and resists the call but at the same time displays a tolerance if it is part of a nationalist discourse. But in the last instance to decide the number of children should be in the initiative of the individual according to her. Lastly, Filiz finds instances of both nationalism and patriarchy in Erdoğan's call. The discourse is interpreted both as Turkish nationalism and Islamism by different woman activists. Leyla and Filiz find the call nationalist, but Leyla attributes a positive meaning to it while Filiz is totally against. The arguments made by women of Kemalist backgrounds either referred to Islamism or traditionalism hidden in the call for three children. Moreover similar critics on the call about attributing primacy to give birth as the role of women in the family is identified as 'conservatism' of a religious party by Nermin while it is nominated as 'patriarchy' by Filiz. Nevertheless despite different formulations and labelings used in their positions, the women interviewed are all against any intervention on the decision to give birth a child or children. Only Leyla seems to tolerate it for national causes but she personally does not by that argument by saying that she won't give birth to a third child due to the Prime Minister's appeal.

Women's Sexuality in Turkey

Women's sexuality has been a key area in which the patriarchal system maintains its power and control on women in collaboration with political, economic, social and cultural mechanisms. Religion also intervenes in this equation and is argued to be appropriated by these mechanisms to legitimize the control over women's sexuality.<sup>148</sup> After her researches in Muslim societies on women's sexuality İlkaracan finds out that the practices associated with Islam that limit women's freedom and insult them sexually is actually far away from the essence of Islam.<sup>149</sup> The position of women in Islam is a controversial issue considering the coexistence of arguments that Islam brought liberation to the women or put them into an inferior position.<sup>150</sup> Women's conditions in the context of Islam could be discussed more but this study interests more with how Islamic discourses interact with other discourses and work together with them to affect women's lives.

The control on women's sexuality in Turkey appears as a rallying point of different discourses. Kadioğlu argues that female sexuality is ignored in the context of Kemalism, socialism and Islamism despite the fact that they diverge in their approaches to the woman question.<sup>151</sup> Kadioğlu says these projects treated women not as individuals but as objects of the projects and defined them within the

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<sup>148</sup> Pınar İlkaracan, introduction to *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies*, ed. Pınar İlkaracan (İstanbul: Women for Women's Human Rights, 2000), pp.1-15.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p.13.

<sup>150</sup> Ayşe Kadioğlu, "Women's Subordination in Turkey: Is Islam Really the Villain?," *The Middle East Journal* 48, no:4 (December 1994), p.653.

<sup>151</sup> Ayşe Kadioğlu, *Cinselliğin İnkarı: Büyük Toplumsal Projelerin Nesnesi Olarak Türk Kadınları*, 75 Yılda Kadınlar ve Erkekler, p.100.

boundaries of the family.<sup>152</sup> It is argued that within the Kemalist project, women's participation to public life was promoted as a significant part of the Westernization attempts. Yet their existence in public and private spheres was bound to the conditions that they have to behave as sexless in the former while they are expected to maintain their roles as mothers and wives in the private sphere. On the other hand, the headscarf became a symbol in the resistance of Islamists against the pervasion of Westernization and women's roles as wives and mothers in the house have been prioritized.<sup>153</sup> In the socialist discourse particularly before 1980s, before the emergence of independent feminist movement, women were addressed as 'bacı', as sexless comrades. Thus "women's sexuality has become a site where different community projects and distinct conceptions of common good are generated."<sup>154</sup> In this context first a general understanding on sexuality in Turkey will be given, and then brief information will be given about the codes in the constitution with regards to sexual crimes. Then a sexual violence case will be analyzed due to its close relation with the Üzmez case. In the end in the given context of sexual violence in Turkey the answers of the interviewees will be analyzed.

Women's sexuality has a strong link with perceptions of honor in Turkey. Virginity is still evaluated as a valuable asset of unmarried women and it is a matter of honor for the family in contemporary Turkey.<sup>155</sup> Cindoğlu argues that modernization and liberation of women did not decrease the significance of virginity before marriage. In such a context where women's bodies and sexualities are not

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<sup>152</sup> Kadioğlu, pp.90-91

<sup>153</sup> Kadioğlu, p.96

<sup>154</sup> Defne Suman, *Visions of Morality, Modesty and Modernity in Contemporary Turkey: 'The Case of Fadime Şahin'* (master's thesis, Bosphorus University, 2000).

<sup>155</sup> Dilek Cindoğlu, "Virginity Tests and Artificial Virginity in Modern Turkish Medicine," *Women's Studies International Forum* 20, no.2 (March 1997), pp.253-261.

their own but their male relatives, husbands, tribes and/or societies to protect their honor, women's sexuality become an issue of males. The issue gets more vulnerable and sensitive for men when men in question code the aim of their life as to maintain their honor. Reflections of this patriarchal understanding are also distinguishable in the laws placed under Turkish Penalty Code. Also being subject to the criticisms of women's organizations sexual crimes against women used to be defined as crimes against society in the law, in the name of general morality and the order of family and society, approving the control of women sexuality by the society.<sup>156</sup> The codes are not formulated to protect sexual and bodily integrity of women but refer to the concepts such as honor, chastity and dignity that work to the disadvantage of women.

The campaign conducted by women organizations between the years of 2002 and 2004 proved fruitful in that it caused the modification of nearly 40 articles of the Turkish Penal Code to the advantage of women.<sup>157</sup> The new TCK accepted in 2004 treated women as individuals vis a vis crimes of sexual violence: "New Turkish Penal Code defines sexual crimes as crimes against individuals but not as against society. It is arranged under the section 'Crimes Against Sexual Immunity.' It is a significant development because women are recognized and protected as individuals having sexual and bodily rights by this law."<sup>158</sup> Even though the patriarchal mentality in the Penal Code is transformed through these changes to some extent and the women began to be treated as individuals with their rights in the law, their

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<sup>156</sup> Pınar İlkaracan, introduction to *Müslüman Toplumlarda Kadın ve Cinsellik*, ed. Pınar İlkaracan (İstanbul : İletişim, 2003), pp.12-13.

<sup>157</sup> "Türk Ceza Kanunu'nda Cinsel Haklarımız Var!," *Kadının İnsan Hakları - Yeni Çözümler Derneği*, accessed February 20, 2011, [http://www.kadinininsanhaklari.org/files/TCK\\_CHVfinal.pdf](http://www.kadinininsanhaklari.org/files/TCK_CHVfinal.pdf).

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* "Yeni TCK ise, cinsel suçları topluma değil, kişilere karşı suçlar olarak tanımlıyor. 'Cinsel Dokunulmazlığa Karşı Suçlar' bölümünde cezalandırıyor. Bu çok önemli bir gelişme çünkü kanun böylece, kadınları cinsel ve bedensel hakları olan bir birey olarak tanıyor ve koruyor."

disadvantageous position continued in the practice. The number of women murders increased by fourteen fold between 2002 and 2009 as revealed by Justice Ministry.<sup>159</sup> In this context the reluctance of the Islamist government and Women's Ministry to apply the reforms to the practice has been criticized.<sup>160</sup> Some feminists believe that the stress on motherhood and difference of women from men in speeches of Erdoğan contributes to unequal position of women in the society.<sup>161</sup> The Istanbul Feminist Collective protested the discourses of Erdoğan during the International Istanbul Woman Meetings hold in November 5, 2011 by opening banners in the middle of Erdoğan's speech. The texts in banners were establishing a relation between his discourses and the increase in murders of women: "as long as women are denied equality to men, they continue to be killed."<sup>162</sup> Sexual violence and women murders are taken as issues of emergency to the contemporary agenda of the women's movement that two separate platforms were established to organize the struggles. The feminist movement succeeded to draw attention of the public and media to these issues and carried them to the agenda of Turkey.

Incidents of sexual violence were also carried to the agenda of Turkey and discussed in political and religious terms. In Turkey such cases were sometimes

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<sup>159</sup> "Number of Women Murders Increased by 1400 Percent," Bianews, accessed February 20, 2011, <http://bianet.org/english/gender/132753-number-of-women-murders-increased-by-1400-percent>.

<sup>160</sup> "Women Murdered in Turkey Skyrockets with Rise of Islamism," *Waronterror*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://waronterrornews.typepad.com/home/2011/03/women-murdered-in-turkey-skyrockets-with-rise-of-islamism.html>.

<sup>161</sup> "Kadınlar Başbakan'a Anlatıyor: "Kadın Erkek Eşitliği Nedir, Ne Değildir?," *Bianet*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://bianet.org/bianet/kadin/126007-kadinlar-basbakana-anlatiyor-kadin-erkek-esitligi-nedir-ne-degildir>.

<sup>162</sup> In the original language: "Eşit değilsiniz dendiğçe daha çok öldürölüyoruz." "Kadın ve erkek eşit değil' diyen Erdoğan'a protesto," *T24*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://www.t24.com.tr/haberdetay/109732.aspx>.

used to alter politics even though they are real or constructed. The manipulative power of these cases indeed derives from the increased sensitivity towards women's sexuality in patriarchal societies. Below, I will present some opinions on Fadime Şahin case which will be used to contribute to the debates on Üzmez case due to their taking place in relation to a sexual incident both within groups known as conservative Islamists. Suman in her thesis approaches the discussions made over the case as the crystalization of power positions between different social projects, including Islamists, feminists and secularists, which were constructed earlier than the Fadime Şahin case but became most visible with it. Moreover it does not only reflect the divisions between these groups but also the fragmentation among Islamists particularly on the issue of religious marriages in Islamic sects. The author argues position of Islamists on this issue vary due to the extent of appropriation of modernity by Islamists. There is convergence between the criticisms of male secularists, feminists and radical Islamists, positioned against to traditional Islamists, on the grounds of exploitation of young women by sect leaders.<sup>163</sup>

The Fadime Şahin case took place within the Islamic sect Aczmendi in 1996 that occupied the agenda of Turkey for months and it is argued this case was the event that triggered the post modern coup of February 28. Mid-1990s observed the rise of Islamist Welfare Party following its electoral success in general and local elections and it revived the concerns of secular and laic sects of coming of Sharia system. The news about doubtful explanations of the members of Welfare Party and its president Erbakan against the Republican system were adding to these concerns. Having this tensious background, the Aczmendi sheikh Müslüm Gündüz's house was busted due to his management of an illegal Islamic sect. At the time of the bust he

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<sup>163</sup> Suman, p.25.

was found half naked with a woman who is one of the followers of the sect, Fadime Şahin. Müslüm Gündüz declared that they had a religious marriage with Fadime Şahin, but when Fadime Şahin appeared on TV news she denied the existence of a religious marriage and told other stories of sexual harassment within Islamic sects.

It is claimed that Fadime Şahin case was a conspiracy to prevent the rising of Welfare Party and to legitimate a coup d'etat by the army. She was supposedly a hostess in a night club and Ali Kalkancı was an alcoholic unemployed man and they were brought together to discredit the Islamist Welfare party. According to one narrative the choice of a sexual scandal to discredit the party was determined after an opinion search on what could degrade the party most in the eyes of the people. For this taxi drivers were told about the corruptions of the government but the reactions was not extreme. Yet when they were told about sexual abuse of the girls in Islamist sects the reactions were too strong and the conspirators determined to create such a story. Even though this narrative is true or not it can be said that this event caused a huge reaction in the public that the incident occupied the agenda of Turkey for months. Fadime Şahin appeared in different TV channels in this process and her crying face stuck in people's minds. After a while they are all disappeared from the screens and the Aczmendi sect dispersed.

Islamist woman intellectual Fatma Barbarosoğlu in an interview assumed a very exclusionist stance towards Fadime Şahin. Her main concerns are not derived from the possible negative effects of the case against the images of Muslims but from the possible damage Fadime Şahin case would give to the struggles of Muslim women. She said this case contributes to the portrayal of covered young women vulnerable and easily deceived and it may discourage the families of these young women in Anatolia to send them to universities as Şahin stressed many times she is a

university graduate in the television news. She sees a contradiction in support of feminists and laic women to Şahin on the grounds that an image of a deceived woman would damage them too. Further Barbarosoğlu argued that they would better support the successes of Muslim women which they did not before. Barbarosoğlu seems to wait contribution of these women to construction of a powerful image of Muslim women to which Fadime Şahin could give an ultimate damage. On the other hand she criticizes male Islamist intellectuals who immediately defended Müslüm Gündüz without making an investigation on the issue and arguing for the legality of second wife regardless of the conditions which disturbed not only Muslim women but also some Muslim men.<sup>164</sup>

Even though they occupied the agenda of Turkey and became a site to reflect political polarizations, the effects of the cases were not experienced in the same way at least by the Islamic community. Perceptions and ways of living of Islam changed over the years with the increasing interaction of religious communities with liberalism and capitalism. Moreover, the sections in the society giving support to an Islamist party become diversified by inclusion of liberal and leftist groups. These facts to some extent relieved the burden on Islamists as if they are opponents of the existing Republican system. The process that carried Fadime Şahin case to a point of coup d'état arouse from an already tense environment on the grounds of threat of Sharia. However the reflexivity shown on the part of Islamist men to protect the suspected person or at least to stay neutral was because not to strengthen the hands of the other sides who may use the incident to degrade Muslims.

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<sup>164</sup> Fatma Barbarosoğlu, "İkinci Eş Zaaftır," *Milliyet*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/1997/01/22/entel/entel.html>.

In the following part, the Üzmez case will be examined looking at the discourses of women from diverse political and ideological positions, yet the ultimate aim is to understand their ways of articulation on the case and focusing on the process rather than just to locate them in a power struggle.

### The Hüseyin Üzmez case

During September 2008, the media was occupied by the news of sexual abuse of a 14 year old girl in which Hüseyin Üzmez, a columnist in Vakit newspaper<sup>165</sup>, was arrested among the suspects. Üzmez's name was identified after a monitoring process of the telephone conversations of the girl's mother and father who are suspected to force her prostitution. The jurisdiction process itself became sensational via the decisions of Institute of Forensic Medicine<sup>166</sup> and the court decisions made to the detriment of the girl abused. Üzmez was arrested in Mudanya and was put into jail for six months until the Institute of Forensic Medicine decided that the girl did not suffer from a mental disorder originating from the incidence in question and Üzmez was released on 28 September 2008. Following the adjudication of B.Ç.'s lawyers and Bursa bench, the institution convened again and this time decided the existence of mental illness by majority of votes on June 2009<sup>167</sup> and the Bursa High Jurisdiction Court adjudicated a prison sentence of 13 years 1 month 15 days for Üzmez due to sexual abuse while he was acquitted from the crime of restriction of

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<sup>165</sup> Vakit newspaper is publicly known as a publication of radical Islamists.

<sup>166</sup> It is an institution applied to in sexual harassment and rape cases that are brought to court to determine if the claimed act did cause a mental disorder on the injured party. In Turkey in order to be able to prove the existence of crime, such a report mentioning a mental disorder have to be taken from Institute of Forensic Medicine, which serves under Justice Ministry. Feminists criticize the sole authority of the institution to take decisions functioning with a patriarchal mentality and provide advices for better handlement of these sensible cases. Among this there is the legal acceptance of reports taken from university hospitals and independent doctors.

<sup>167</sup> "Hüseyin Üzmez Bir Yılı Aşkın Süredir Yargılanıyor," Bianet, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://bianet.org/bianet/bianet/115861-huseyin-uzmez-bir-yili-askin-suredir-yargilaniyor>.

freedom on 16 september 2009. The girl's mother was acquitted from all accusations. However the fifth chamber of High Court of Appeal reversed the previous judgment due to procedural grounds –since it is before not asked that if the abused child or advocates of SHÇEK<sup>168</sup> participated to the court- on July 2010. Then lastly the case was sent back to the fourth Bursa High Criminal Court which was handled in 9 March 2011 and the court determined the release of Üzmez considering the high court of appeal process and the duration of his detention- two and a half years.<sup>169</sup>

Abdurrahman Dilipak, another columnist of Vakit newspaper, wrote two columns about Üzmez case. Dilipak's first reaction was a general one questioning the intention behind such news rather than a comment on the content of Üzmez case. He says such news are done either to damage one's reputation or to denigrate a particular community through the personality of one individual. Having a doubt of conspiracy he thinks this might be part of a bigger plan, just as it happened in the process of 28th February.<sup>170</sup> In one of the articles Dilipak warns the religious community about the upcoming Ramadan month, a time when Muslim community confronts speculations. He advises Muslims to avoid from the situations that may put them in difficulty and thus provide an opportunity to the media to denigrate Muslims. Moreover he urges the Islamic community to investigate on the reality of the news provided by 'fasık' people<sup>171</sup> before believing them and stigmatizing the suspected person in the news. Then he conveys the last developments with regards to the

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<sup>168</sup> SHÇEK: Social Services and Child Protection Agency. For more information, please check: <http://en.shcek.gov.tr/mission-and-vision.aspx>.

<sup>169</sup> "Hüseyin Üzmez Hem Ceza Aldı Hem Tahliye Edildi," *Bianet*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://bianet.org/bianet/kadin/128474-huseyin-uzmez-hem-ceza-aldi-hem-tahliye-edildi>.

<sup>170</sup> "Abdurrahman Dilipak Üzmez Olayını Yorumladı," *Haberaktuel*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://www.haberaktuel.com/abdurrahman-dilipak,-uzmez-olayini-yorumladi-haberi-126192.html>.

<sup>171</sup> Used for not unbelievers but sinful, perverse people.

Üzmez case that there found no instance of rape and the case now is conducted on the grounds of merely molestation and it also is on shaky grounds.<sup>172</sup> He waits for the release of Üzmez to prove his own assertions; it is a debt of honor of him according to Dilipak. In the other article he separated most part to examine the concept of 'lolita'<sup>173</sup> and sees a challenge in the approaches of patrons of other media companies who give morality lessons over the Üzmez case but do not problematize the existence of little girls in their newspapers emphasizing their sexual attractiveness. He gives some excerpts from the newspaper Hürriyet as an evidence of their support of lolitas in which pictures of young models aged around eighteen are given and a seductive language is used while commenting on their beauty. Dilipak questions the sincerity of the reactions shown against the Üzmez case, while the crime was not yet become absolute at that time and because of their stance towards lolitas.<sup>174</sup> Zaman newspaper, another Islamist newspaper belonged to a popular religious community, published an editor writing announcing that they are maintaining a position of neutrality including the Üzmez case as they always do on the basis of their principles. Zaman newspaper is noted as separating the least space to Üzmez case in comparison to Sabah, Hürriyet and Cumhuriyet.<sup>175</sup>

Islamist women writers are also asked about their ideas about Üzmez case just after his first arrest. Among them Emine Şenlikoğlu shows her astonishment by commenting that Üzmez could not have done such a thing and if he did it, it is

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<sup>172</sup> Abdurrahman Dilipak, "Ramazan geliyor aman dikkat!," *Timeturk*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://www.timeturk.com/tr/makale/a-dilipak/ramazan-gelior-aman-dikkat.html>.

<sup>173</sup> "Lolita" and "loli" has come to be used as a general reference to a seductive or sexually attractive young woman. Wikipedia, s.v. "nubile."

<sup>174</sup> "Dilipak'tan Bir Hüseyin Üzmez yazısı daha!," *Tüm gazeteler*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://www.tumgazeteler.com/?a=2828918>.

<sup>175</sup> Aslı Tunç, "Mediated Justice: Turkish Newspapers' Coverage of Controversial Criminal Cases," *Turkish Studies* 11, no.4 (December 2010), pp. 643 – 661.

because he was either in a state of insanity or he was given a pill. Sibel Eraslan mentions that she doesn't want to believe to the reality of the situation and she desires it to be a conspiracy. Yet regardless of the reality, she is against to turn the case into a lynching campaign via instrumentalization of a little girl.<sup>176</sup> Eraslan suspects from a psychological operation by the media against Muslims via the increasing news on sexual deviations of religious men.<sup>177</sup> She says the appetite of the media in its attempt to destroy the honor of an old Muslim man Üzmez gives harm to a little girl whose future should be more taken into consideration than a man of 78 years old. Özlem Albayrak, a columnist in Yeni Şafak newspaper says if the incident is true, it is pedophilia and sign of a pathetic mind and Üzmez's previous speeches given to various media sites raise doubts in which he declares a weakness towards beautiful women. Their comments over the case along with the writers of Vakit newspaper interpreted as attempts to excuse the rape for the name of Üzmez by Hürriyet newspaper giving the title: "Rape Excuses from Islamist Writers."<sup>178</sup>

Ayşe Böhürler from Yenişafak newspaper starts her article by citing some instances of pedophilia from US and Europe. In these countries pedophilia is assumed as incurable and pedophilia patients are not arrested but kept under observation by state authorities and the schools, society centers and police stations that the patient lives around are warned. After this start, Böhürler handles Üzmez case on the grounds of pedophilia and stresses on the negative effects of the existing

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<sup>176</sup> "İslamcı yazarlardan tecavüz bahaneleri," *Hürriyet*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=8809645>.

<sup>177</sup> "Sibel Eraslan: Üzmez'i Vurun!," *Turktime*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://www.turktime.com/haber/SIBEL-ERASLAN-/19707>.

<sup>178</sup> 'İslamcı Yazarlardan Tecavüz Bahaneleri'

legal mechanisms in Turkey by increasing suffer of the victim.<sup>179</sup> She also criticizes the media since that it provided opportunities to Üzmez to express himself. In the rest of the article she conveys the ideas of experts emphasizing the necessity to give priority to the societal and individual health rather than political struggles.

In another article she says it is not her job to deal with private lives of people but if the immoral action is defended on the grounds of religion they are the ones to resist against it at first.<sup>180</sup> She criticizes the approaches of Islamist men for their concentration on the possibility of conspiracy and at the end she has doubt that if it is a solidarity between Muslims or solidarity of men:

Especially, if we are talking ethics and children, circumventing the issue by saying tolerance, empathy, and conspiracy is against and harmful to the spirit of piusness. I am against both the generalization of weaknesses and ethical corruption of people to all religious people, and excusing immorality. One has to reprobate the misconduct more than reprobrating the person. Only then, immorality can be defined appropriately.<sup>181</sup>

The issue should not be a male fellowship beyond religious fellowship.<sup>182</sup>

Böhürler's approach displays similarities with the approaches of feminists in problematizing the Forensic Medicine process and focusing on insufficient penalties in the law system even though they differentiate in their motivations. For instance

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<sup>179</sup> Ayşe Böhürler, "Hüseyin Üzmez Vakası," *Yenişafak*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/Yazarlar/?t=01.11.2008&y=AyseBohurler>.

<sup>180</sup> Ayşe Böhürler, "Erkek Kardeşliği," *Yenişafak*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/yazarlar/?i=10701&y=aysebohurler>.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. "Hele mesele ahlak ve çocuklar olunca hoşgörmek, anlamaya çalışmak, komplo diye geçiştirmek dindarlığın ruhuna sığmadığı gibi zararda verir. İnsanların zaafı ve ahlaki düşüklüklerini dini kimlikleri nedeniyle tüm dindarları kapsayan bir tartışma alanına dönüştürülmesine de, yapılan ahlaksızlığa göz yumulmasına da karşıyım. Daha çok kimin yaptığı değil işin kendisi lanetlenmeli. Ahlaksızlık ancak o zaman doğru tanımını bulabilir. Mesele din kardeşliğinin ötesinde erkek kardeşliği olmasın!"

while the concerns of Böhürler concentrated on societal and individual health, and it is a matter for her firstly as being a mother, Özkazanç declaring her feminist perspective looks for the intertwining of the mechanisms of the state, justice system and patriarchy that the case provides opportunity to explore these relationships. The questions that need to be asked from a feminist perspective with regards to Üzmez case are as such according to Özkazanç:

Why and how was BÇ mistreated? Why is the law system is helpless in protecting the right of a little girl? What is the source of this reluctance, indifference, biasedness, and inability? To dig deeper the question is what is the nature of this twilight zone where law, state and patriarchal system are intermingled in a complex way?<sup>183</sup>

Depending on the change between the first statements given to attorney by Üzmez and the father and mother of the BÇ and the statements given during the first trial, Özkazanç argues that Üzmez has a considerable authority over the family and his daring in this process derives from this fact. The relation between the family and Üzmez is interpreted as a sexual, class-based bargaining by Özkazanç depending on the financial support of Üzmez that continued from the years BÇ's grandfather served as a housekeeper to Üzmez's family and this led the family to overlook Üzmez's sexual intimacy towards BÇ. She explains this particular point based on diverse axes of oppression as such:

The sexual and class-based bargaining that took place between the family (of BÇ) and Üzmez is an expression of a peculiar intersection of the oppressive relations between men and women and the exploitative relations between the upper classes of the Islamist community and lower classes of the society. Along with a

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<sup>183</sup> Alev Özkazanç, "Hüseyin Üzmez Olayı," *Kasaum*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://kasaum.ankara.edu.tr/gorsel/dosya/1255597765uzmez.pdf>. BÇ neden ve nasıl mağdur edildi? Neden hukuk küçük bir kızın hakkını korumakta aciz kalıyor? Bu gönülsüzlük, lakaytlık, tarafgirlik ve beceriksizliğin kaynağı nedir? Daha derine inip sorarsak, hukuk, devlet ve ataerkil düzenin girift bir etkileşime girdiği bu alacakaranlık kuşağının mahiyeti nedir?

pedophilia character this specific intersection became such a hateful case.<sup>184</sup>

Özkazanç argues that regardless of the age of the victim, sexual harassment damages physical and psychological health, and therefore the first report of Forensic Medicine is inaccurate. Moreover the absence of a child psychologist in the 6th board, the inappropriateness of the environment during the examination that revictimizes the child are other critics of the author. Yet Özkazanç argues that these criticisms are superficial. The aim of the report given by Forensic Medicine is not to prove if the claimed incident happened or not but to determine the degree of the harm to decide on the duration of the arrest which changes generally between three and fifteen years. The diagnosis that the girl is healthy, according to Özkazanç, derives from the fact that she is socialized in an environment based on exploitation and already learned and normalized the patriarchal bargaining between men and women. It is the patriarchal structure of justice system that does not see the exploitation behind what it perceives as normal.

Women from the İstanbul organization of the Republican Party made a protest in front of Vakit newspaper building in Mahmutbey. They shouted as “Mullahs to Iran” (Mollalar İran’a!) and tenth year national anthem was played from the RP’s bus.<sup>185</sup> Sabah and Hürriyet evaluated the case as individual aberration while Cumhuriyet used it to promote the dichotomy it establishes between ‘corrupt Muslim and decent secularist’. Zaman is the newspaper that separated the least space

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid. “Aile ile Üzmez arasındaki bu cinsel ve sınıfsal (dinsel statü de dâhil) pazarlık, kadınlar ile erkekler arasındaki tahakküm ilişkileri ile İslamcı kesimlerin üst sınıfları ile toplumun alt sınıfları arasındaki himayeci istismar ilişkilerinin özgül biçimde kesişmesini ifade etmektedir. Bu kesişim, araya katalizör olarak pedofil bir karakterin de girmesiyle ortaya nefret edilesi özgül bir biçim çıkarmıştır.”

<sup>185</sup> “Vakit Gazetesi Önünde Üzmez Protestosu,” *Milliyet*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/Siyaset/SonDakika.aspx?aType>.

to Üzmez case and limited the content of the news just with technical details about the process. An author from Vakit, Selahaddin Çakırgil, criticized the attitude of the newspaper on this matter for not being clear and harsh enough. He appreciates another Islamist newspaper Yeni Şafak by making its headline “Shame on You!” (Utan be Adam!).<sup>186</sup>

### The Şahin Öğüt Case

After nearly 6 months another rape case broke out occupying a large place in media. It was Üzmez’s conservative Islamist identity as a rapist that made the molestation news valuable enough to find a first page place and this time it was the rapist’s job that guaranteed a first page place to normally third page news; Şahin Öğüt was an artist of State Opera and Ballet working as a tenor. Along October 2008 rape cases of female children started to come successively to the police office urging police to mobilize in order to find the rapist and separate cases were carrying similarities in terms of the ways rape is done. The perpetrator was knocking the door and asking a name or an address or requesting a glass of water from the person answering the door, then threaten that person with a knife, fettering with a packing tape, raping, grabbing and leaving; the girls raped were mostly under eighteen.

Öğüt was tracked by the police just after another rape case in Bahçelievler in Ankara yet he succeeded to disappear from sight, his motorcycle found left in a parking area of a shopping center. The following day the police busted his mother’s house, found him there and arrested. After this, jurisdiction process began. First it was written that he was not surprised when he saw the police and confessed his crimes. Newspapers gave their headlines with a focus on his job, here are some

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<sup>186</sup> “CHP’li Kadınlar Vakit Gazetesi Önünde Üzmez’i Protesto Etti,” *Bianet*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://bianet.org/bianet/toplum/110661-chpli-kadinlar-vakit-gazetesi-onunde-uzmezi-protesto-etti>.

examples: “‘Helmet-mounted Pervert is a Tenor’, ‘Who is the Pervert with Helmet?’, ‘Helmet-mounted Pervert is an Opera Artist’, ‘Helmet-mounted Pervert is an Opera Artist and Soldier.’”<sup>187</sup> In time other rape cases concerning Şahin Ö. began to be reported. A colleague from his university, F.O. from ballet department filed a claim that Şahin Ö. raped her, and she knows 4 other girls who were raped by him too but they are afraid to speak. Another detail brings into discussion at this point that F.O. already brought the case to the court in 2001 but Öğüt was acquitted by the court referencing to weird preambles like F.O was not virgin at that time and Şahin had jean that day which makes so difficult to rape.<sup>188</sup> Father of Şahin Ö. was a security director while the trial proceeds and it is questioned that if his father’s job had been influential in the court’s decision. On the other hand since the cases in Ankara carry similarities with three rape cases took place in İstanbul, after a research by the police, it was found out that Şahin was at the back of those rape cases too.

We began to read news that Şahin got punishment amounting to 82 years at a court. Yet the problem was Court of Appeal’s cancelling of the punishments due to different reasons such as that the report claiming the victim’s mental health was badly influenced from the rape case was not taken from Institution of Forensic Medicine but a university hospital. Actually it has been a big issue in the feminist agenda that they claim the institute causes another trauma to the raped woman. First due to its workload it gives an appointment only after two years and since it is a long time the court releases the suspected person whose crime has not yet been proved. Moreover it is claimed the group in the institution responsible from preparing the

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<sup>187</sup> *Stargazete*, 27 October 2008; *Gazetevatan*, 26 October 2008; *Türkiyegazetesi* 27 October 2008; *Cumhuriyet*, 27 October 2008. “‘Kasklı Sapık Tenor Çıktı, ‘Yakalanan Kasklı Sapık Bakın Kim?’, ‘Kasklı Sapık Opera Sanatçısı Çıktı’, ‘Kasklı Sapık Opera Sanatçısı Askermiş.’”

<sup>188</sup> Ersin Tokgöz, “Kaskın Altından Operacı Sapık Değil Biz Çıktık,” *Radikal*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalYazar&ArticleID=906449>.

report do not constitute from adequate experts to be able to determine a mental disorder, especially after the crisis in Üzmez case that they determined a 14 year old girl do not suffer from a mental disorder after sexual harassment.

A feminist activist Selda Tuncer followed the case with other feminists from “FeministBiz” initiative and shared her observations in an article in 2009. At that time, she says there are 11 suits brought against him committed during 2008 except the one committed in 1995. Şahin did not attend the court until June 2008 and during the court he demanded time to prepare his defense. When he attended on July 23rd he only told about the rape case that happened 15 years ago giving all details, claiming that it was not a rape but an agreed sexual intercourse. However he said that he does not remember anything about the cases that recently happened. Selda Tuncer thinks it is a tactic that he tries to create an image that he is suffering from psychogenic amnesia<sup>189</sup> and it is a good strategy considering most of the acts have been committed during October 2008.

#### Interviews On The Üzmez and Öğüt Cases

Leyla declared that sexual harassment is unacceptable irrespective of the doer, be it Üzmez, our relative or even our father. She reminds the declaration “A Call to Vakit Newspaper from Religious Women” (Dindar Kadınlar’dan Vakit’e Çağrı) that she contributed to the preparation of the text.<sup>190</sup> First she makes a notice that that at the time the declaration was published it was yet not proved that Üzmez is guilty therefore their reaction was against his reckless conducts and talks specifically about the woman (girl’s mother) in front of cameras rather than the molestation case itself.

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<sup>189</sup> Memory loss which is restricted to a particular period of time, such as the duration of a violent crime.

<sup>190</sup> <http://vakitetepki.blogspot.com/>

Having the focus on the conducts and talks of Üzmez as appeared in television news, she was reluctant to interpret the molestation case before he is formally charged by the court. In consideration of the highlightings Leyla made on the issue I read the declaration again and encountered with the same emphases:

For this reason, we demand that you fulfill the responsibilities of your Muslim stance which you make reference to, and we demand that you cut off every connection with this person who inculcates Muslims. A column given to this person either in your newspaper or another one will upset and dishonor the women, the religious, and everyone who has a conscience in this country.<sup>191</sup>

The declaration calls Vakit newspaper to do the ‘right’ thing coding it as a necessity of being Muslim and they qualify Üzmez as a person implicating other Muslims.

She learned about 13 years prison sentence at the time of the interview and her reaction was such that: “If he did something like this –you say he was punished- still I don’t know whether it’s right or wrong, so even if he did something like this, be it any person anyway, be it Üzmez, our father, or our relative, it doesn’t matter, it isn’t something acceptable, definitely not...”<sup>192</sup> These sentences are illuminative of her position to the extent that they are based on different types of concerns compelling Leyla to oscillate between assuming a determined position against a case of molestation and the concern of preventing the Islamist community from being brought under suspicion due to an immoral act of one publicly known conservative ‘religious’ man. Moreover despite the finalization of the sentence by the court she could hardly places reliance on the impartialness of the decision. When I reminded

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid. Bu nedenle sizden; referans verdiğiniz Müslümanca duruşun sorumluluğunu yerine getirmenizi, Müslümanları töhmet altında bırakan bu şahısla tüm irtibatınızı kesmenizi talep ediyoruz. Gerek gazetenizde gerekse başka bir gazetede bu kişiye verilecek bir köşe, bu ülkenin kadınlarını, dindar insanlarını ve vicdanı olan herkesi üzecek ve bizlerin haysiyetini rencide edecektir.

<sup>192</sup> Eğer böyle bir şeyi yapmışsa- ki ceza almış diyorsunuz- yine de ceza almış olması bile bilemiyorum ne kadar doğru ne kadar yanlış da, hani eğer böyle bir şeyi yapmışsa, zaten bu kim olursa olsun, ister Üzmez olsun, ister babamız olsun, ister kendi yakınımız olsun farketmez, Kabul edilebilir bir şey değil. Kesinlikle değil...

her subsequently altered decision of the Institute of Forensic Medicine that the girl molested was psychologically hurt, she confessed her mistrust to media and justice system. Such a chaotic atmosphere in which it is hard to decide whether something is truth or manipulation leads her to avoid from making statements over single cases, she says. After then she finished her response by indicating that it is out of discussion that one should take the heaviest sentence if there is an incident of rape, molestation or whatever committed against a child.

Leyla reveals her preference not to comment on specific cases while talking about rape or molestation in the context of an atmosphere she finds chaotic due to difficulties to know the truth especially in the existence of partial media and justice systems. Yet in this study the idea in formulating the questions on the basis of specific cases was to observe the constitution of women activists' subjectivities which are not believed to be fixed into certain categorizations over diverse events. Having the concern of possible manipulations to be made over the case to the detriment of religious people Leyla refrains from evaluating the case and just provides her decisions through generalizing the issue.

Then when I asked her ideas about Şahin Ögüt case she gets excited and complains about a disproportionate interest showed by the media against similar matters. This is a proof for her that the reaction showed against the former case is not a sincere one as the extent of it changed along with the change of the identity of the perpetrator. After then she begins to complain from the injustices of the justice system that make it unable to convince people to the legitimacy of the given court decisions. On the other hand laws are not sufficient on their own, according to Leyla, to prevent the commitment of crimes since people would continue to perpetrate a crime in times they do not pretend to be caught. Therefore she believes the real

motivation to dissuade people to commit a crime may rather come from moral and humanitarian education. She again proposes moral education as a solution as she does with regards to issue of preventing honor crimes.

Filiz begins to answer my question about the Üzmez case by complaining from the implementation of laws and acts concerning sexual harassment and rape in Turkey. She remarks that legal reforms are not sufficient to prevent or dissuade persons from committing such crimes despite the existence of harsh penalties in the law, since in practice rapists are put into prison for at most two or three years. Besides this situation, women usually do not file a complaint and when they file, it becomes not functional. She views the obligation to take a report to prove that the victim is psychologically hurt from the Institute of Forensic Medicine as unjust and traumatic, especially the authorized sixth specialized board of the Institute that the employees are not sufficient to take such critical decisions. As another handicap she counts late appointments. At this point before I asked the next question about the Şahin Ögüt case, she spontaneously mentioned his case as a disappointing case for feminists with the Court of Appeal's cancel of a 21 year prison sentence for Şahin due to the fact that the report was not taken from Forensic Medicine but a university hospital and the length of the sentence was found too much.

What is outstanding in Filiz's response is that she handles the cases of Üzmez and Şahin as if technical matters related with judicial processes without making any particular reference to perpetrators' identities or jobs. Nevertheless I asked her if Şahin's being a tenor surprised her, she replied no:

Actually, in all our declarations we state that it is not something surprising because abusers, rapists, murderers are the men are the nearest ones, and actually they can be Turkish, Kurdish, lawyer, doctor, engineer, worker, or unemployed. To be raped it is

sufficient to be a woman, likewise it is sufficient to be a man to rape.<sup>193</sup>

Asking her idea about the reasons of disproportionate interests showed at least by the media towards the Şahin and Üzmez cases, she said since Üzmez is a popular, conservative Islamist man writing in Vakit newspaper, opposition to Üzmez equated with opposition to AKP, even though he has not direct relations with AKP: “Since Üzmez was perceived, as if other men are right, as a strike against political islam, it had a different reflection on public opinion.”<sup>194</sup> However in the case of Şahin, she says, it did not intersect with any political opposition and it was the feminists who undertook the responsibility of following the suit. She also appreciates the declaration of religious women against the Üzmez case saying it was an appropriate behavior. Filiz interprets the cases of Üzmez and Şahin in the context of legal mechanisms to deal with sexual abuse and rape by remarking their deficiencies specifically concerning the Forensic Medicine. She searches for the solutions within the limits of legal sphere as could be understood from her suggestions such as to increase the amount of punishment with regards to cases of sexual violence, to presume the correctness of women’s statements and transfer the burden of proof to the perpetrators and to permit the intervention of independent women associations to the courts.

In “Feminist Politics”, the publication of the socialist feminist organization SFK, two authors write about the ways four different sexual harassment and rape cases are handled by mainstream media specifically focusing on the Üzmez and

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<sup>193</sup> Biz aslında bütün açıklamalarımızda bunun şaşılmayacak bir şey olduğunu söylüyoruz çünkü taciz edenler, tecavüz edenler, cinayet işleyenler en yakınımızdaki erkekler ve aslında o erkeklerin Türkü, Kürdü, avukatı, doktoru, mühendisi, işçisi, işsizi yok. Tecavüze uğramak için kadın olmak yetiyor, bunu yapmak için de erkek olmak yetiyor.

<sup>194</sup> Üzmez’i devirmek- sanki başka erkekler haklıymış gibi- sanki siyasal islama dinciliğe vurulan bir darbe olarak algılandığı için kamuoyunda farklı bir yansıması oldu.

Şahin cases. The Üzmez case is the most discussed one among others and they bind this to the maintenance of laicism-religiosity opposition through these cases. They reveal their aim in writing the article as to show how news of violence against women are instrumentalized for contemporary political issues by overshadowing the main issue of violence against women. Highlighting Şahin's job in the headlines is a sign of secular reflex that reproaches to a person works as a state opera singer to rape including secular sentiments. On the other hand highlighting Üzmez's religiosity some news makes connections between being religious and being perverse. Then they conclude as such:

Here, not violence against women but the dominance of ideological reflexes comes into prominence. The frame of these discussions made us think that, in terms of giving due to violence against women and making it visible, it is appropriate to make an exhibition of violence without showing deference to evaluations based on personal histories or social statuses of individuals.<sup>195</sup>

To what extent religious women's reaction against Üzmez case was appropriate has also been discussed by two other feminist activists. Gülnur Savran wrote an article in Socialist Feminist Collective's publication 'Feminist Politics' about the risk that feminist politics may turn into an identity politics for the sake of coexisting with our differences and she analyzes BSC around these concerns.<sup>196</sup> Providing an opportunity for a dialogue between covered and uncovered women, the dialogue will be meaningful unless it turns into a transformative experience. The reaction showed against the Üzmez case by religious women, some of whom were members of BSC,

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<sup>195</sup> Cemre Baytok and Deniz Saltukoğlu, "Kadınsız Taciz ve Tecavüz Haberleri," *Feminist Politika*, no.1 (winter 2009), pp.50-51. "Burada kadına yönelik şiddet değil, ideolojik reflekslerin baskınlığı ön plana çıkıyor. Bu tartışmaların çerçevesi bize, kadına yönelik şiddeti hakkını vererek görünür ve bütünlüklü kılmak açısından, kişilerin özgeçmişleri ve toplumsal konumları içinden çıkan değerlendirmelere paye vermeden şiddeti teşhir etmenin yerinde bir tutum olduğunu düşündürdü."

<sup>196</sup> Gülnur Acar Savran, "Kimlik Politikası, Kadın Dayanışması, Toplumsal Cinsiyet," *Feminist Politika*, no:1 (winter 2009), p.19.

through the proclamation of ‘‘A Call to Vakit from Religious Women’ is viewed as a sign of that transformation by Savran. However since the text did not handle the matter within the context it happened, meaning with context religious conservatism and AKP governance- it was problematic. From this aspect she thinks that the text fixed identities while trying to make politics along differences.<sup>197</sup> –it is not clear what she means with ‘transformation’- A writer from *Amargi*, Gülnur Elçik responds to Savran’s criticisms about BSCÇ and the handling of Üzmez case.<sup>198</sup> According to Elçik, the expectation from covered women to say something about religious conservatism or AKP government means to identify those women responsible from the problems. She does not find meaningful to search for definite expressions in order to notice a criticism. Being directed against Üzmez, whom it is a taboo to criticize within Islamist circles, the text itself is a criticism according to Elçik. Considering the news published in Vakit newspaper that the platform which released the proclamation may have taken money from *Hürriyet* newspaper, religious women’s criticism was appreciable.<sup>199</sup>

First of all what Savran means with ‘transformation’ is not clear in the article but it can be derived from the example she gives as a sign of transformation. For her, BSCÇ was an initiative in search of a potential to coexist with differences, it would be an important step taken by these women if it could become transformatory and the reaction of a group of religious women from this platform against Üzmez may be an indicator of such a transformation. Then the transformation happens on the part of

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Gülnur Elçik, ‘‘Feminist Diye Biri,’’ *Amargi*, no.12 (Spring 2009), pp.6-8.

<sup>199</sup> *Hürriyet* belongs to Doğan media group and known as reflecting Kemalist/laicist viewpoints. To reach the news in Vakit and some responds from the religious women : <http://www.haberpan.com/dindar-kadinlardan-vakite-cagri-haberi>.

religious women-if it does- and there is no mention about a transformation on the part of other women from the alleged heterogeneous community of the initiative.<sup>200</sup>

Nebahat focusing on the institution of Forensic Medicine, connects the first report given by the Institute declaring that the psychological health of the girl was not affected from the case to the intervention of Gülen community to the case. Nermin complains from distortions of the state institutions in Turkey as Institute of Forensic Medicine. Their positioning on this issue was configured through the fear of reappropriation of state institutions in line with the interests of Islamists and the case of Üzmez is just an instance of this transformation. On the other hand I had to explain the details of the Şahin case since they were not informed about it before and therefore I had to ask directly that if the job of the perpetrator as an opera artist bewildered them. As they usually referred to the necessity of education as causes of and solutions to diverse problems, this instance at first sight appears as a challenge to their dependence on education argument. Nermin assesses the case as a personal disorder of that person and Nebahat explicitly states that she does not think psychological deviations can be dispelled by education. Therefore they both consider the issue as a personal psychological deviance.

I asked Ayten if they supported the proclamation of the religious women related with the case she replied they probably gave support to it but there is a larger problem that they are generally not invited to give support since there is still a prejudiced view against them deriving from their Kurdish identity and they usually get involved in processes through their own efforts without being invited. Ayten also emphasizes that with regards to Şahin case it is a customary mentality working regardless of the profession or age as they previously declared through the campaign

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<sup>200</sup> Savran, p.19.

of the group Democratic Independent Woman's Movement 'Let's Overcome Rape Culture and Create Democratic Free Society.'<sup>201</sup> She says married women are exposed to rape every day since that to satisfy the sexual desires of the husband is viewed as the duty of the women. From this aspect the critic of the comprehension of sexual intercourse as a duty of woman to the husband has similarities with the arguments formulated from a feminist perspective which stresses the fact that women do have sexual desires as against the understanding that associates sexual intercourse with reproductivity. However Ayten does not formulate it as a reflection of patriarchy in the sexual relations as it is formulated in most feminist perspectives but uses the term 'customary mentality'. On the other hand the definition of the 'rape culture' is made in a broader way in the context of the campaign to include more than the rape against women:

Starting from possession of a woman's body by force, various use of forces are described as rape. Rape of dwelling, rape of the land, rape of human rights is conceptions frequently used. Due to the narrow usage of the present time; rape culture which is identified by possession of a woman's body by force, does not merely consist such force, though it includes it. In this sense, confiscation, possession, spoliation, usurpation of clans, tribe, public, nation and tangible and intangible values of society characterize rape culture.<sup>202</sup>

This broader definition of rape is problematized by some feminists that when the rape against women is equalized with the rape against a community, nation or soil

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<sup>201</sup> The original name of the campaign: 'Tecavüz Kültürünü Aşalım, Demokratik Özgür Toplumunu Yaratalım'

<sup>202</sup> "Savaş, Irkçılık ve Milliyetçilik Karşıtı Feminizm," *Bianet*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://bianet.org/biamag/print/125028-savas-irkcilik-ve-milliyetcilik-karsiti-feminizm>. Kadın bedenine zorla sahip olmadan başlayarak uygulanmakta olan birçok zor, tecavüz olarak nitelendirilmektedir. Haneye tecavüz, toprağa tecavüz, insan haklarına tecavüz en çok kullanılan kavramlardır. Günümüzün dar kullanımı itibariyle kadına zorla cinsel olarak sahip olmakla özdeşleştirilen tecavüz kültürü, bunu da içermekle birlikte sadece bundan ibaret değildir. Bu anlamda kabileye, aşirete, halka, ulusa, toplumun maddi-manevi değerlerine, toprağa zorla el koyma, sahip olma, talan, gasp etme tecavüz kültürünü ifade eder.

woman turns into an object and the role of the patriarchal system in the rape is failed to notice. Ayşegül Devocioğlu says the association of the soil with the female body as an object to be protected and in need of defence turns the woman body into an arena of conflict. It is common to all nationalist and ethnic ideologies that the country is constructed as a woman (body) the honor of whom should be protected. Yet it is a fact that woman body has already been made an area of conflict in Turkey considering the huge rates of sexual violence experienced by Kurdish women. Sexual violence has been used as a tool of torture and revenge particularly to politically active women during the war between the Turkish army and Kurdish forces of PKK that has been going on for 30 years. Within the scope of a project that provides legal aid to women under surveillance vis a vis sexual harassment and rape, among the 236 applicants between the years of 1997 and 2006, 187 of them was Kurdish women.<sup>203</sup>

The sexual violence experienced by Kurdish women could not be analyzed separately from their ethnic identity as Zozan clearly explains:

Being a Kurdish woman, when I walk through the dark street of Van city, I am frightened of, both because of being a woman and Kurdish. Meanly, as I can be exposed to sexual assault because of my woman identity, I can be attacked as I am Kurdish. In fact, the deepest traumas in the life of many women happened because of sexual assault committed by subjects who are government members or by paramilitary, gang groups inside of the government. The subjects committed attacks to women either apparently or secretly.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> “Cinsel Şiddet Mağduru Kadınların Çoğu Kürt,” *Bianet*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://bianet.org/kadin/azinliklar/122859-cinsel-siddet-magduru-kadinlarin-cogu-kurt>.

<sup>204</sup> Zozan Özgökçe, “Militarizm ve Kürt Kadını,” *Kaos-GL*, accessed August 25, 2011, <http://www.kaosgl.com/sayfa.php?id=6966>. Turkish version of this quotation is available in APPENDIX A.

## Conclusion

Given these diverse approaches on the cases of Üzmez and Öğüt it seems that there is not a single definition of sexual violence that the content and perpetrators of which could be demarcated clearly. The polarization between Kemalists and Islamists established on the dichotomy between modern and traditional and the war between Turkish army and Kurdish forces of PKK has to be included in the analysis in order to make a comprehensive discussion on sexual violence in Turkey. For all sides of the debate it is beyond question that sexual violence against women is unacceptable but it is not always easy to determine who the perpetrator is and even to speak out the name of the perpetrator even though when it is apparent. The humiliation of the Islamist community over Fadime Şahin case in which the perpetrator was the sheikh of a sect makes Islamists more sensitive towards accusations of men known with their piety. Having a concern to not to bring Muslim people under suspicion some Islamists may prefer to interpret such incidents of sexual violence as conspiracies. This concern basically derives from the association established too quickly between religiosity and sexual deviance by the secular media. These experiences better explain the avoidance of Leyla, defining herself as a religious person, to label Üzmez as a perpetrator even after she is told he was penalized. Therefore Leyla's stance against sexual violence with regards to Üzmez case is immanent to the tension between religion and modernity in Turkey.

Here it is important to remember that even though it is argued that the particular experiences of Leyla should be taken into consideration in understanding her position against sexual violence, it does not mean to approve her position. Yet it

is necessary to expand the boundaries of the discussion on sexual violence by becoming aware of the sensitivities of women coming from different backgrounds since all these backgrounds contribute to their construction of knowledge on particular subjects. On the other hand it is also possible to witness differentiations between the positions of the women coming from the same ideological and political movements. Ayşe Böhürler, writing in a conservative Islamist newspaper *Yenişafak* and a member of the Central Executive Committee of AK Party chooses to examine Üzmez case in her column over the discussion of pedophilia as an illness and problematizing the practices in Forensic Medical Board. The issue is also handled from these aspects by Alev Özkazanç –a feminist-, by the Ankara Woman Platform and the Istanbul Feminist Collective and Böhürler show more similarities in her approach with these women than Leyla. However their emphases in the critics change; the focus is concentrated on the societal health and child health in Böhürler’s position whereas the justice system is accused of being male and privileging the rapist and thus encouraging rape in the other positions. At the end what I want to show through the differences in approaches of Leyla and Ayşe Böhürler known with their Islamist backgrounds that the differentiation in the interpretations of their experiences differentiates their approaches.

From this point of view the war that began 30 years ago between the Turkish army and Kurdish forces of PKK that used sexual violence as a tool of war shall also not be excluded from women’s experiences of sexual violence. Therefore the inclusion of the war conditions to their definition of sexual violence by women from the Kurdish movement is comprehensible since their knowledge on sexual violence is constructed under war conditions. On the other hand Filiz in her response to the Üzmez and Şahin cases just gave some legal details of the courts and when she is

asked about her decisions about the identities of the perpetrators she answered that every man could be a rapist regardless of his ethnicity, profession or anything else and every woman could be raped just for being a woman. Yet even though we don't know the position of Filiz against the particular patterns of sexual violence within the limits of the interview made for this study, she seems to have a tendency to keep the focus on women underestimating the possible implications of the other parts of a woman's identity such as her religion, ethnicity, age or job on her experiences, interpretations and conceptualizations of sexual violence. This stance may come from a feminist perspective that views patriarchy as the producer of the differences between women.<sup>205</sup> The fear is most likely the distraction of the attention directed at patriarchy through a focus on the differences and thus the distortion of the reality, which has the risk to divide the women on an issue that is expected to converge women at most.

#### Discussion On The Headscarf Over The Proclamation 'February 28 Should Not Last 1000 Years'

Headscarf has been a very controversial issue in the political context of the Turkey that it has already turned into a vicious circle for all sides of the discussion. In the extent of this study only the recent developments around headscarf will be taken into consideration by bringing women's viewpoints from Islamist and feminist groups to the fore. Firstly brief information on the positions Islamist women and feminists assumed vis a vis headscarf will be given. Then the reflections of their decisions to the practice will be searched over the proclamation titled 'February 28 Should Not

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<sup>205</sup> Aksu Bora argues that a feminist perspective helps to make an analysis of differences between women by disclosing the relations between power structures that the identities are built on. Patriarchy is claimed to be the ultimate mechanism that produces differences between women. Aksu Bora, "Çirkin Bir Nefret İdeolojisi Olarak Feminizm," *Amargi*, no.10 (fall 2008), pp.20-21.

Last 1000 Years' both of which were established to promote the lifting of the headscarf bans. It makes way to another discussion that questions from which perspective the defense of removal of the bans should be made and this discussion provides an opportunity to observe the divergence points of different ideologies. The Islamist and feminist discourses seem to be converging on the necessity of the removal of headscarf bans but what is more recognizable that despite this agreement on the bans each side continues to maintain their concerns and reservations for the other sides. Then it provides the opportunity to designate the terms of cooperation on this issue. Another remarkable point for the recent struggles given in favor of headscarf is that Muslim women undertook the headscarf problem declaring their impatience for the solution that is promised by Islamist parties and solutions. In addition at the end of this part a small discussion will be referred to on the cooperation between homosexuals and covered women due to the problematization of the support given by a homosexual association KAOS-GL to the proclamation in question by some Islamists.

#### Positions of Feminists vis a vis Headscarf and The Headscarf Struggle

Ayşe Sargın, defining herself as a socialist and feminist, juxtaposes what she thinks as the prejudices of the feminists and socialists in their perceptions of the headscarf. Some of them are such that: even though a woman wears a headscarf as a result of her choice she is accepted as subordinated and dependent; emancipation from religion is viewed as ultimate for emancipation of women; a particular struggle of human rights given by a group is legitimized in the eyes of them unless they give support to other human rights struggles.<sup>206</sup> She opposes the immediate association

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<sup>206</sup> Ayşe Sargın, "Kürkçü ve Kalyon'a: Solcu bir Feministten Başörtüsü Yasağı Üzerine," *Bianet*, last modified February 18, 2008,

established between the headscarf and subjection to male hegemony. Such an approach totalizes covered women as a group and prevents to see how those women articulate their position subjectively against the patriarchal system.<sup>207</sup> She says when women's liberation is reduced to the struggle given against religion and religious doctrines, patriarchy as the main obstruct in front of the emancipation of both covered and uncovered women is missed. All of the women come to face with sexist conducts and implementations; "doing free labor at home; being employed in some business lines called women's work in the market, in the informal sector and in the sex industry; being exposed to discrimination in wage and social security and to gender-based physical, sexual and verbal violence both in the private and public sphere... to be seen as the object of male sexuality both in the society and the media."<sup>208</sup> Moreover she criticizes feminist and socialist movements to not to differentiate themselves in their approaches from other discourses against the headscarf on the grounds of that the bans are violations of human rights and the discrimination experienced by covered women derives from their being women. Their alleged male counterparts in the state institutions could go to the prayer room, grow a moustache and read a newspaper that represent their political positions and fast during Ramadan but women could not show up with their headscarves.

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<http://bianet.org/bianet/bianet/104954-kurkcu-ve-kalyon-a-solcu-bir-feministten-basortusu-yasagi-uzerine>.

<sup>207</sup> Ayşe Sargın, "Örtülü Kadınlar, Örtüsüz Kadınlar ve Erkekegemenlik," *Bianet*, last modified February 19, 2008, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/104987-ortulu-kadınlar-ortusuz-kadınlar-ve-erkekegemenlik>.

<sup>208</sup> "evde ücretsiz işçilik yapıyor; piyasada kadın işi denen iş kollarında, kayıt dışı sektörde ve seks endüstrisinde çalıştırılıyor; ücretlendirme ve sosyal güvenlikte ayrımcılığa ve hem özel, hem kamusal alanda cinsiyet-temelli fiziksel, cinsel ve sözlü şiddete maruz bırakılıyor... toplumda ve medyada erkek cinselliğinin nesnesi olarak görülüyor." Sargın, *Örtülü Kadınlar*.

A feminist from Amargi group, Müjgan Arpat argues that feminists should establish their politics towards headscarf on the basis of freedom of women. Thus , according to her, along with the fact that there are women who are externalized from public sphere because of their headscarf, feminists must keep in mind the fact of enforced veiling as well. Arpat claims that the female children who are forced to veil and sent to Quran courses rather than schools outnumber the women giving struggle against headscarf bans. She supports the covered women against the violence and humiliation they experienced due to their headscarf, yet she views the headscarf itself as a political and religious symbol of a patriarchal understanding that puts women in a secondary position to the service of men and treats them as sexual objects. Thus she thinks feminists in their support should prioritize the situation of forced veiling rather than the bans on headscarf since it represents a life style that subordinate women to men and ignore women's sexuality.<sup>209</sup>

Aksu Bora, a writer in Amargi journal, adds the factor of economic class to the analysis of headscarf debate in Turkey that covering has been perceived as a marker of lower class women.<sup>210</sup> She evaluates the huge reaction and anger to covered women in demand of university education as the reluctance of the 'center' to share the public sphere with the 'periphery'. The center accepts headscarf as long as it stays as the cover used by the women of lower classes but begins to perceive it as a problem when the covered women demand education, which is interpreted as transgression of the boundaries. For the part of feminists she argues to handle the headscarf issue in relation to the other types of male domination on women's body.

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<sup>209</sup> Müjgan Arpat, "Türban Özgürlük Mücadelesi mi?," *Birgün*, last modified July 6, 2007, [http://www.birgun.net/forum\\_index.php?news\\_code=1183738701&year=2007&month=07&day=06](http://www.birgun.net/forum_index.php?news_code=1183738701&year=2007&month=07&day=06).

<sup>210</sup> Aksu Bora, "Zenciler Birbirine Benzemez," *Amargi*, last modified June 18, 2009, <http://www.amargi.org.tr/?q=node/338>

The commands that are directed against women as ‘cover your head’, ‘uncover your head’, ‘be thin’, ‘be sexy’ and ‘be blonde’ are rarely different from each other, according to Bora. The author reminds feminists the importance of learning from diverse experiences of women and she advises feminists to try to understand the sentiments of Muslim women towards headscarf by establishing a relation with their own experiences. At the end, Bora believes, this will contribute to the attempts of discovering what is common between the different experiences of women. At this stage she finds the practice of ‘listening’ significant to be able to expose the connections.

#### Interpretations Of Islamist Women About The Headscarf and the Headscarf Struggle

The politicization of religious women and their activism in public sphere grew out of their participation to headscarf protests along with Islamist men beginning from the early years of 1970.<sup>211</sup> During their increasing intercourse with Islamist men, Islamist women have faced with discrimination and unequal attitudes and they began to be critical about the male dominant Islamist community. Through their first hand experiences Islamist women become aware of the male hegemony in the Islamist movement. For instance after the protests against the headscarf bans the men expected women go back to their homes. The struggle for the allowance of headscarf in universities has been identified as the cause of all the Muslims but not the cause of

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<sup>211</sup> As it is explained under the heading Islamist women’s movement in this study an Islamist woman intellectual Yıldız Ramazanoğlu tells that politicization of religious women do not just derive from their activities in the headscarf struggle. The migration from urban to rural areas forced conservative families to adopt new strategies to conform to new conditions in the city and having their daughters to take education was one of them. In addition the development of communication channels allowed women to take information from and about outside and saved them from the limitations of the information the male members of the family bring to the house.

particularly the women.<sup>212</sup> A witness from those protests tells that the support of the Muslim men to the headscarf cause could more appropriately be understood if it is considered in the context of a sacred struggle given for the symbols of the religion vis a vis the hatred of governors and elites. In other words the headscarf case was an opportunity for them to oppose against the system. Muslim men are claimed to have hesitations about women's taking education. Hidayet Tuksal reveals a memory of her own in the Divinity School that when a woman asked a question to the instructor during the lesson it was interpreted by men as deriving from a concern to show herself rather than a sincere curiosity.

On the part of political experiences it is an all agreed fact that the success of Islamist Welfare Party in local elections of 1994 owes to the studies of specifically Istanbul Woman Commission and its president Sibel Eraslan. However their endeavor was not appreciated by the party and they were not provided opportunities.<sup>213</sup> All these experiences lead Islamist women to reassess women's position in the religion as Göle explains appropriately: "...the more they (Islamist women) find themselves in conflict with the traditions or interpretations that prescribe maternal and marital duties as their foremost moral obligations; this forces them to find sources of religious legitimization and tolerance for recognition of their new social practices and individual life strategies."<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Ruşen Çakır, *Direnış ve İtaat: İki İktidar Arasında İslamcı Kadın* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2000), p.63.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Nilüfer Göle, "Contemporary Islamist movements and new sources for religious tolerance," *Journal of Human Rights* 2, no.1 (March 2003), p.18.

For the headscarf case Nazife Şişman argues irreconcilability of feminism and to argue against the headscarf bans. On the other hand, she believes that the headscarf issue should be formulated neither as women's issue/problem (like 'only women use headscarf and they become victims because of it') nor as the right of a cultural group. The parallelism established by feminist discourses in Turkey between putting headscarf and embracing a secondary position in the society is similar to the discourses of Western centered women's rights movements. Having this perspective at the background, the author thinks it is not possible to solve the headscarf problem by handling it as part of the problems of women. Another possible effect of such an approach would be to undermine the ontological dimension of covering:

For the ones who embrace being covered (tesettür) as indicator of a position between God and its subject it would cause a great problem to ground being covered on a conjunctural premise such as woman rights. What is to be considered here is the reversal of priorities of values. By defining headscarf problem as a woman's problem, the person prioritizes her identity against men but not in front of Allah. In other words on the grounds of this formulation she is not a subject under the command of Allah but a woman different from men who do not have to cover their heads and maybe a woman not just different from but against those men.<sup>215</sup>

There is also a fundamental difference in feminists and religious women's viewpoints towards 'body'. The feminist claim 'our bodies is ours' is accepted contrary to the Muslim body which is viewed as a charge to attain God's mercy and women cover their heads as appropriate to this charge. Based on this formulation, this choice is different from the choice used in the feminist jargon.

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<sup>215</sup> Nazife Şişman, *Emanet'ten 'Mülk'e: Kadın Bedeninin Yeniden İnşası* (İz Yayıncılık:İstanbul, 2003), p.122. Turkish version of this quotation is available in APPENDIX A.

## Over the Proclamation ‘February 28th Should Not Last 1000 Years’

On February 28, 1997 a post-modern coup-d'état took place in Turkey through some acts of the conservative Islamist Welfare Party, a party of the coalition government with True Path Party at that time, which were interpreted as the steps towards Sharia system. On that day, during the meeting of National Security Council, some decisions that emphasize the maintenance of laic system in Turkey prepared by generals were imposed to the Welfare Party to sign, and in the ongoing process the party leader Erbakan was made to resign from the presidency. Another Islamist party AKP attained a landslide victory from both 2002 and 2007 general elections and initiated a process that exposes unrealized coup d'état plans. Among these one coup plan named Balyoz brought the EMASYA protocol to the agenda again, signed during February 28 process which was known as granting soldiers the right to intervene into societal events as the result of the negotiation between General Staff and Ministry of Internal Affairs. Through the consensus of the parties, the protocol was abolished in February 2010 and it was identified as the ending of one period by the news.<sup>216</sup> In the proclamation ‘February 28 Should Not Last 1000 Years’ it is claimed that the men and women of the Islamist community experienced this democratization process asymmetrically that while a lot of Islamist men could again become members of the parliament, the atmosphere of February 28 continued for women through the headscarf bans. AK-DER, as a women's organization established mainly to struggle against headscarf bans, published a declaration on February 2010, after 13 years from February 28. In the motto of the campaign they gave reference to a sentence used by a former Chief of Defense Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu that the effect of the February 28 would last a thousand years. In the declaration it is told how difficult

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<sup>216</sup> Habertürk, 5 February 2010.

were the situations experienced by the covered women due to the bans by preventing them to enter into public sphere, being devoid of university education and being unable even to attend to the state's needlecraft courses.

They said this situation should not last 987 more years since the conditions changed a lot, and at this point a more critical part comes to the fore. They claim that February 28 left its mark at most on the headscarf issue and this matter should be resolved without being conditioned to bettering of other issues. It seems like an appeal to AKP parliamentarians who enjoy from their high status positions. This is also supported by a direct call in the text to AKP government to remove the bans immediately from all parts of the life. It ends as such: "Because tomorrow saying 'we tried but it didn't work' will not be significant in the eyes of sufferers. There isn't any 987 years more which the women with headscarfs will live!"<sup>217</sup> There is also a resistance against the advices of the males from their community to stay patient and wait for the right time.<sup>218</sup>

I asked Leyla what she thinks about the widespread support given to the proclamation. She replied that the more segments of the society becoming aware of the realities now. She believes Turkey is not univocal anymore and people began to understand that there are other worlds and kinds of persons that are not taught to them before. Various associations came together under certain organizations, where these different persons have to meet each other and it was with HABITAT that they first came together with other women organizations in İstanbul:

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<sup>217</sup> Zira yarın "denedik ama olmadı" sözünün mağdurlar indinde hiçbir değeri olmayacaktır. Başörtülü kadınların sabırla yaşayacağı 987 yılı daha yok!

<sup>218</sup> AKDER, "28 Şubat Bin Yıl Süremez," 28 February (blog), February 28, 2010, <http://28subat1000yilsuremez.blogspot.com/>.

We came across each other for the first time in Habitat period, different sections of society and İstanbul women NGOs were gathered together for the first time and we saw each other there. Everybody had *en garde* gazes upon each other but today our looks became neutral in this kind of gatherings, therefore, there are more opportunities to meet. We realized that we had been tricked, so how can we meet at the same grounds because we think the same things, so we are all against restrictions.<sup>219</sup>

Then I asked what does she mean to be deceived and what prevented these people come together, she replied immediately: “It was Kemalist elite who embraces the country as their own, but now we know we are all equal citizens of this country, no one has any priority.” Then I asked to what she builds on her differentiation between old feminists and new feminists (I have read in another interview made with Leyla where she makes such a distinction): “Old feminists did not accept you even as women if you do not comply with their norms. But recent feminists focus more on being woman, disregarding if they are covered or not.” Before, Leyla says, they could not endure even our existence in meeting tables, but now we sit together and talk about our problems. She adds that this does not mean they compromise in every issue, but they realized that they could meet and drink tea together, which is a considerable progress.

As a response to the same question, Zozan reacted against the exclusion of KAOS-GL from among the signatures due to the disturbance of some Islamist groups which also signed the proclamation and made pressure over AK-DER to remove the sign. AK-DER requested KAOS-GL to remove the sign and they withdrew their sign explaining that the signature was for to support the case given against headscarf bans and if it does not help to this end then it is not meaningful to keep the signature there. Zozan says their association withdrew its sign as a reaction to KAOS-GL’s exclusion

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<sup>219</sup> Turkish version of Leyla’s account is available in APPENDIX A.

saying that it is sometimes necessary to be beaten for each other. On the other hand she says all the covered women she knows in her life do cover themselves through enforcement. Nevertheless in order to be able to speak about headscarf, Zozan believes, first the bans should be removed. It is not equal on the other hand for Zozan, similar to the arguments of some feminists, that while men of the same ideology could enter into universities or state institutions, the women could not.

Ayten could not remember if they signed the proclamation. Using the pronoun 'we', she says they proclaimed their political stance through the agency of woman Kurdish parliamentarians on behalf of freedom of headscarf in universities. With regards to February 28 Platform she remembers that they evaluated it as a good reaction against Islamist men since they instrumentalize women to their politics and leave them aside after they achieve their aims.

Filiz says her association did not support that case since it was not a text just demanding the removal of headscarf bans but it is connected to the February 28 process and instrumentalized for a certain type of politics. However it seems inconsistent that while she advises as a strategy to link different while making politics, when it comes to other types of politics it suddenly becomes a wrong manner for the women. It is a kind of enforcement towards Islamist women to expect them to separate themselves from conservative politics. Filiz keeps her position that she is against headscarf bans but she does not approve the practice of covering and views it necessary to discuss with other women but for a healthy discussion to take place she believes the bans should be removed first. Nermin thinks today's headscarf is a politicized one, she calls it 'türban' and she claims the headscarf used by women from upper classes has a different meaning and therefore she supports the bans while mentioning that she has no problem with the headscarf used by Anatolian women.

## Removal of the KAOS-GL's sign from the List of the Campaign

Hidayet Tuksal discussed in her column in Star newspaper the removal of the KAOS-GL's sign from the list due to the demand of AK-DER. She expressed her dissatisfaction from this situation that she finds unjust and discriminative.<sup>220</sup> She interprets the broad support given to the campaign from different sections of the society as not a direct support to the headscarf but a support to the victims of the headscarf bans. She argues the commonality among the signers of the declaration of the campaign derives from a resistance to injustice and discrimination despite the existence of concerns and doubts of these people about headscarf and Islamism. Tuksal dislegitimizes the kind of exclusionist attitude vis a vis rights struggles depending on the identity of the group that the homosexuals in Turkey mostly face with.

Yasemin Öz, an activist from KAOS-GL, wrote a thanks letter to Tuksal for her sensitivity shown towards the issue and explains the details of the sign crisis. Women from AK-DER explained the high pressure put on them by some groups to the KAOS-GL that these groups do not want their signatures coexist with the signature of a homosexual association. Then Yasemin Öz offered the removal of their sign from the list if it does not bring any help to AK-DER.<sup>221</sup>

Another wave of the debates about the headscarf occurred over the regulation in the constitution that permits headscarf in higher education boards which was passed in the parliament on February 9, 2008 which will be discussed here to contribute the examination of the relations between covered women and

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<sup>220</sup> Hidayet Tuksal, "Birlikte Pişmeye İhtiyacımız Var," Star Newspaper, March 3, 2010, <http://mobil.stargazete.com/pc/gazete/yazar//birlikte-pismeye-ihciyacimiz-var-haber-247547.htm>.

<sup>221</sup> KAOS-GL, "Birlikte Pişmeye Kuşkusuz İhtiyacımız Var," Kaos-gl, last modified March 5, 2010, <http://www.kaosgl.com/sayfa.php?id=4413>

homosexuals.<sup>222</sup> Just after the regulation on removal of the headscarf bans in universities the proclamation ‘Freedom for Everyone’ was prepared by covered women touching the critical issues of freedom in Turkey.<sup>223</sup> They expressed that freedom is not meaningful until it is valid for everyone.

Akif Emre, from Yeni Şafak newspaper, reacted to the defense of issues related with Islam by using a liberal discourse, which transcended just being a strategic ally for Islamists but fully occupied the political and economic spaces.<sup>224</sup> In this context he is against the defense of the headscarf case referring to human rights and universal values that devoids headscarf from its religious meaning. Relying on such a discourse, Emre discusses, brought some covered women to the point of defending the rights of homosexuals. He indicates his distaste to the concepts of personal choice or woman identity and construction of a conflict between the two sexes. He says the headscarf as a religious command is also under the responsibility of male Muslims and they could not be externalized from this struggle as it is attempted by some Islamist women in their invitation of the men to take their hands out of the women.<sup>225</sup> He claims that the feminist discourse divides Muslims into two

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<sup>222</sup> The law is amended with a majority of 79 percent. (403 votes in favour, 107 votes against) The amendments grant that everyone has the right to equal treatment from state institutions and everyone has the equal rights to higher education. However Constitutional Court annulled the amendment due to its inconviency to the basic principles of the constitution on June 5th, 2008. In the ongoing process women began to wear headscarves in some of the campuses informally.

<sup>223</sup> Ntvmsnbc, 16 February 2008.

<sup>224</sup> Akif Emre, “Başörtüsü kadın sorunu mudur?,” Yenişafak Newspaper, last modified February 26, 2008, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/yazarlar/?i=9533&y=AkifEmre>.

<sup>225</sup> “Bizi rahat bırakın. Beyler kavganızı kendi üzerinizden yapın.”

camps as men and women and formulates the headscarf problem as a woman issue.<sup>226</sup>

As a response to Akif Emre's article, Hilal Kaplan writes a letter in which she depicts her ideas about feminism and homosexuals. In that letter Kaplan explains the intention behind their support to homosexual struggle with Islamic references.

Rather than building a wall against the feminist and gay movements by saying "you are sinner", I choose to talk to them, to notify and represent, because these people need to see their ignorance about religion and we have had very good results so far, Alhamdulillah. For example, at the latest workshop bringing gay/feminist people and Muslims together (we organized it in order to answer the question why Muslims and gays cannot produce politics together) we have very clearly stated that: gay and feminist politics is bedroom politics and pornographic per se. It over-reproduces the political mechanism that is opposed by itself, it is cruelty. Consequently, we received very positive reactions, realized that even some gay friends had approved our views. Everyone having confessed their ignorance about Islam, asked for more.<sup>227</sup>

She explained further that the support given to the homosexual struggle depends on their unjust experiences by the system and it is made with reference to Islamic justice but not a libertarian one: "The heavens and the earth stands with justice."<sup>228</sup>

Identifying her position as a representative and conveyor of a certain perspective, Kaplan risks to fall into a position on which Islamist women have been very much critical. It is a very early criticism that a group of Muslim women posed to feminists in 1988. They complain about the instructive position feminists established as if they only have the knowledge and perspective to emancipate women in comparison to

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<sup>226</sup> Akif Emre, "Başörtüsü Nasıl Savunulmaz?," Yenişafak Newspaper, last modified February 28, 2008, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/yazarlar/?i=9565&y=AkifEmre>

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. The Turkish version of this account is available in APPENDIX A.

<sup>228</sup> It is Prophet Muhammed's saying: Gökler ve yer adaletle ayakta durur.

other ideologies and religions.<sup>229</sup> The similarity between Kaplan's position and the criticized positions of feminists emerges through the perception of solidarity understood by one group as a tool to maintain its hegemony. In contradiction to Akif Emre, Kürşat Bumin from the same newspaper embraces the proclamation due to its ability to empathize with outside through the information of the inside.<sup>230</sup> He moreover problematizes the silence of the mainstream and Islamist media over this news including Yeni Şafak.

During an interview Havva Yılmaz, one of the co-authors of the proclamation, says that they prepared it to alleviate the critics that have been directed at liberals that their support to covered women is one sided.<sup>231</sup> Hilal Kaplan added that liberals are not the only defenders of freedoms and through this proclamation they proved this. These reactionary stances derive from often-heard criticisms against Islamists that their freedom understanding is limited to freedom of headscarf. In the explanation of another co-author of the proclamation Neslihan Akbulut signs of a pragmatically claimed support to other suppressed groups in Turkey can be found: "Despite the fact that I'm a person who completely rejects homosexual praxis, if I would not object to

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<sup>229</sup> Çakır, p.56.

<sup>230</sup> Kürşat Bumin, "İki Parçalı Pazar Yazısı," Yenişafak Newspaper, last modified February 17, 2008, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/yazarlar/?i=9381&y=KursatBumin>.

<sup>231</sup> Fadime Özkan, "Herkes Özgürlük bildirisini yazanlar: Başörtüsünü siyasete ilk alet edenler yasaklayanlar," Star Newspaper, last modified February 25, 2008, <http://www.stargazete.com/yazar/fadime-ozkan/herkese-ozgurluk-bildirisini-yazanlar-basortusunu-siyasete-ilk-alet-edenler-yasaklayanlar-haber-88498.htm>.

police officer's break into the houses of homosexuals and seizure of their money, I could not resist against it when it is done to another person or to me."<sup>232</sup>

## Conclusion

Headscarf struggle has been given on the grounds of the rights discourse and it is apparent that this type of framing attracted the support of feminists and liberals to the headscarf case. The proclamation in question was signed by people of diverse ideological and political positions including Amargi Woman Academia, the association of Bosphorus University (BURA), the platform of 'We Are Looking After Each Other', Revolutionist Socialist Worker's Party (DSİP), KA-DER (Association for the Support and Training of Women Candidates). Yet this cooperation does not mean a direct approval of the headscarf itself but derives more from a mentality that is against the contradiction of freedom. In addition to the violation of rights, feminists view it specifically as a violation of women's rights since they formulate the ban as another type of patriarchal control on women's body. Moreover they, Filiz and Zozan among the interviewees referred to the discrimination towards Islamist women due to the fact that their male counterparts could enjoy their rights in universities, work places and so on and they want to resist against this unequal position that derives from the patriarchy. However articulation of the headscarf issue in the proclamation in relation with the political process experienced during February 28th discouraged at least one feminist to sign the paper. Despite the declaration of her position against the headscarf bans, Filiz and the association she works for did not give sign to the proclamation. She also criticizes AK-DER's attitude towards KAOS-GL and she says the fact that they view

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid. "Eşcinsel pratiği kesinlikle tasvip etmeyen biri olarak, bir eşcinselin kapısının arama emri olmadan kırılıp içeri girilmesine, tutanak tutulmadan parasına el konulmasına itiraz etmezsem, polis bunu bir başkasına ya da bana yaptığında da sesimi çıkartamam."

homosexuality as a perversion on the grounds of Quran, the relation remains unsolvable. At the same time for Filiz and her group Islamist women's approach towards homosexuality sometimes becomes obstruct to come together with them in the cases of struggle in favor of women's rights. By conditioning her cooperation with Islamist women to their support of homosexuals sometimes, Filiz does what Sargin - identifying herself as a socialist and feminist- counts among the common prejudices and fallacies of feminists and socialists. Sargin finds problematic to legitimize a rights struggle unless it gives support to rights struggles of other groups.

Nermin and Nebahat coming from Kemalist backgrounds did not hear about this proclamation. In general terms Nermin refers to the patriarchy in the Islamist movement to explain the difference between Islamist men and women in terms of their opportunities to act in public sphere, public institutions and the parliament. Nermin approves the headscarf used in Anatolia but against the appropriation of it as a political symbol by a group of women who presume themselves intelligent. She also thinks headscarf should not be allowed in the parliament. As one cannot go to a serious place with a swimwear, there are criteria for dresses to be able to enter into parliament. She adds that good attire is like a recommendation letter and people give message through their clothes. By accepting the headscarf used by Anatolian women and opposing it when used by a group of women she defines as living in cities and assume themselves as intellectuals, discourses of Nermin seems to intersect with what Aksu Bora explain as the anger of the center against the occupation of their places by whom they define as traditional and periphery. Headscarf is acceptable unless it stays within the limits of the traditional but if it attempts to exist in universities or parliament it is perceived as a transgression. Nebahat, neither problematizes covered women's existence in public sphere nor makes a negative

comment over headscarf. She is against any oppression that may be derived from headscarf or any other issue since that she believes there should be no intervention to people's choices. What she basically problematizes is that the defense of headscarf case was made by men at the beginning and women allowed them to do this and now even though the women undertake the issue those men won't allow them to realize their aims. She is also against the cooperation of Islamists and feminists for the removal of headscarf bans that covered women used to have somebody to strive for them. Nebahat seems to expect Islamist women to solve the issue by themselves without establishing any cooperation. Therefore even though she does not make a differentiation between headscarf and 'türban' and does acknowledge covered women's demand of removal of oppressions, she wants them to stay away from politics and solve the issue apart from the political context.

#### CHAPTER IV

#### CONCLUSION

Throughout this study I tried to show women's articulation of their positions on specific events in relation to the issues of family, sexual violence and the headscarf, which occupied the agenda of Turkey for a long time. It shows that differences between the experiences of women, and thus in the knowledge constructions based on particular interpretation of their experiences, cause divergence in the positions of women established against the events considered in this study. Moreover, even when the positions articulated by women seem to be similar with each other, the reasons

behind those positioning and/or the priorities and concerns in formulating the positions can be different. On the other hand it is seen in the study that the positions of the women coming from the same movement could be varied due to the different interpretations of their experiences or different determinations on what is better to maintain their position in the society. To make another point, there is also evidence that discourses used by the parties could be same in defending a specific case despite the dissent on the basic principles of the issue. Below, these inferences will be made concrete on the grounds of the events women interviewees were asked their opinions about. At the end it is claimed that the women coming from Islamist, Kemalist, Kurdish and feminist backgrounds produce different woman knowledges that are established on their own experiences and interpretations of the experiences with regards to issues of family, sexual violence and the headscarf. Moreover the implications of the existence of different knowledges to making politics will be discussed in the context of women's movement.

To start with the discussion on family, the interviewees were asked their ideas about the call made by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for three children. Erdoğan made the call to Turkish women in a panel prepared by women for 8 March Women's day to bear at least three children depending on the data that Turkish population is aging and this jeopardizes the future of the economy which is dependent on a working young population. He made a reference to his personal dialogue with former president of Germany, Schröder who said Erdoğan in 20 years Europe will be begging to Turkey to enter into European Union due to the lack of a younger population to maintain the EU. Without mentioning any name Erdoğan said 'what do they want to do is to exterminate Turkish population and don't be deceived' and it remained ambiguous who are 'they' mentioned in the speech. This ambiguity

and coexistence of two different arguments that include the necessity of a younger population for economic reasons and to sustain the growth of Turkish population against those with intention of exterminating Turkish nation added to the diversity of the interpretations.

Filiz associated Erdoğan's call to three children with patriarchy and nationalism. She sees it as to charge women with the responsibilities of bearing children to maintain the growth of Turkish population which restricts women's life opportunities. She said Erdoğan could be a prime minister with four children, but his wife could only be the prime minister's wife. In similarity with feminists' reclaim their authority to the body, Filiz evaluated Erdoğan's call as an intervention of state to the woman body. Ayten said she found this call patriarchal when she looked from the perspective of women and racist from the perspective of Kurdish movement adding at the end that everything that is racist is patriarchal at the same time. There was not a direct reference to Kurdish people in the speech but Ayten defined the speech as racist. Yet in the rest of answer she referred to the previous policies of the state to decrease the number of Kurdish population behind the veil of birth control and interpreted Erdoğan's speech as continuation of the same discourse. Then her evaluation of the speech as racist despite the lack of a reference to Kurdish people derives from her suspicion towards the state with regards to population policies due to her previous experiences in the Southeast region. Leyla first says it is a personal choice to determine the number of children to give birth but she finds the reactions showed against Erdoğan exaggerated. However there is a contradiction in her answer that she both tolerates Erdoğan's call to three children unless it is part of a national population policy and she says the decision to give birth is only under the initiative of the individual and she won't give birth to a third children over Erdoğan's demand.

While she claims herself as the only authority to make such a decision she does not problematize a politician's call to women to bear 3 children. She does not see herself as the addressee of this call which implies that she does not identify herself as member of the group of women. On the other hand in the documents of the association Leyla presides the importance of raising children with national and moral values is emphasized and mothers are declared as responsible to provide this. Therefore she embraces women's roles in childbearing and child raising in opposition to which Filiz found Erdoğan's approach patriarchal.

Nermin identifies giving birth to children as a traditional role imposed to women by men and she finds the discourse of Erdoğan convenient to the activities of his party that encourage women's perpetuation of traditional practices. She meant the courses opened by the party to women to acquire skills such as knitting and hairdressing. Her stance is evaluated by the author as reflective of a modernist position that codes these activities as traditional by overlooking their possible emancipatory effects on women. Nebahat thinks that Erdoğan's call is not related with Turkish but Muslim population as part of an ummah understanding.

Considering these diverse approaches it is seen that the positionings of the interviewees are not independent from their ideological and political positions as in the cases of Nebahat, Nermin and Filiz, their own experiences as in the case of Ayten and their general ideas about motherhood roles of women as in the case of Leyla. These sources contribute to the construction of their reactions and determination of the words they use in interpreting Erdoğan's call to three children.

With regards to cases of Hüseyin Üzmez and Şahin Ögüt women's ideas about sexual violence were tried to be achieved. All the respondees were in

agreement about the unacceptability of child abuse and rape but the formulations of their opposition and their concerns and priorities in establishing these oppositional stances are diversified. For one respondent it was even not easy to nominate Üzmez as rapist. In the background of that part of the study the case of Fadime Şahin was given to provide a context for the discussion of cases in which the rapist is coming from an Islamist community. In the political context of Turkey, Muslims are always exposed to tests with regards to sexuality along with the considerable influence of the media which continuously gives instances of the deviances of religious men. In this context Leyla's avoidance to nominate Üzmez as the rapist despite the existence of a court decision derives from both her suspicion to the justice system and her concern about the images of Muslims. Her concern is also evident in the proclamation she prepared with other religious women titled 'A Call to Vakit Newspaper from Religious Women.' There, they invited Vakit newspaper to fire Üzmez on the grounds of his reckless conducts and talks after his first release in front of the cameras which could implicate other Muslims.

Filiz explains the cases by focusing on implementation of laws and acts concerning sexual harassment and rape in Turkey. When she is asked her ideas about the identities of the perpetrators she stated that when the issue is rape, statuses and professions do not matter; every man could be a rapist and every woman could be raped. Also in the publication of the association Filiz works for, two other members of the association writes that to make visible the violence against women and not to sacrifice it to ideological debates it is a viable option to underestimate the statuses and profiles of the perpetrators. This supports the stance of Filiz against the cases of Üzmez and Öğüt along with the implication that their position can be a part of strategy rather than an actual neutral position towards the identities of the

perpetrators. At this point the position of Gülnür Savran who is a member of the same association strengthens the validity of this possibility. Even though Savran appreciates the protest of Üzmez case by the platform 'We Are Looking After Each Other' in which religious and feminist women came together, she problematizes the lack of a criticism in the text towards religious conservatism and AKP government which is the context the event occurred.

Nebahat and Nermin in their answers problematized the function of Forensic Medical Board since that at first it gave the report declaring that psychological and mental health of the girl was not affected from the case and expressed their concern for the appropriation of state institutions in line with Islamism.

Ayten, similar to Filiz's approach, commented that profession or age of the perpetrator does not matter in the cases of rape. Yet she views the occurrence of rapes as the result of customary mentalities. Then she begins to tell about the campaign of her group conducted against sexual violence called 'Let's Overcome Rape Culture and Create Democratic Free Society'. In that text the rape against women and the rape against (Kurdish) community treated as equal and some feminists criticized it by arguing that it reaffirms the possession of woman body by men to protect their honor.

As the data shows, women's sensitivities, interests and what they emphasize vary in particular cases of sexual violence and in order to achieve the knowledge produced by the women on sexual violence the contexts that these features are constituted from within have to be considered. For instance it is needed to know the press on Muslims over sexual deviance cases by especially the secular media in the political context of Turkey to be able to comprehend Leyla's avoidance of speaking

on the particular case of Üzmez. However, as mentioned above, this does not mean an approval of Leyla's position but more it is the rejection of a position that intends to equalize the approaches of all women against the cases of sexual violence. On the other hand it is a too quick criticism that Ayten's evaluation of the rape against women on an equal foot with the rape against the soil and/or nation reaffirms the mentality, which conceptualizes honor in relation to female body considering that the women in Kurdish movement had a lot of experiences of sexual violence by the state officials under custody. This does not mean they do not experience sexual violence at home, as Ayten says she knows a lot of cases of rape in marriages, and the connection established between the female body and the soil may be to the detriment of women by maintaining a traditional understanding of honor. Yet at the end the suffering experiences of women still continue based on their being Kurdish women whose body have been already made a site of war and the experience of suffering has more urgency compared to the need of a change in the mentality of the people on honor. Therefore even though the issue is sexual violence on which women are expected to cooperate due to its prevalence in marriage and in the society, the attempt to apply the previously determined principles and frameworks of any feminism to the particular events excludes the experiences and interpretations of some women and ignore their particular knowledges by claiming the hegemony of its own knowledge.

To discuss the headscarf issue I asked the interviewees about the proclamation 'February 28 Should Not Last 1000 Years' prepared by AK-DER in demand of lifting of the headscarf bans by linking it with February 28th process. During the time the proclamation was published and opened for signature, in the political agenda of Turkey coup plans against the government of AK Party were

being exposed and military officers and previous generals were being put on trial. These developments perceived as the proof of democratization of Turkey that the military has been suspended from politics. In this atmosphere of democratization women demanded the removal of headscarf bans and warned the government to take an action. On the other hand among the signatures of the proclamation coming from different groups, the signature of KAOS-GL, an organization that defends the rights of homosexuals, caused a conflict among Islamists. Some Islamist groups become disturbed from the coexistence of their signatures with the signatures of homosexuals and pressed AK-DER to remove the group's sign from the list. After KAOS-GL was informed about this controversy, it offered the erasure of their sign. These developments caused a debate over the relations between Islamists and homosexuals and aroused suspicion over the intimacy of freedom demands of the Islamists.

In that chapter first brief information was given on the positions of some feminists and Islamists over headscarf. It was seen that feminists mentioned in that part do not support headscarf as they see it as a symbol of male domination yet they position themselves against the headscarf bans. Their opposition to bans derives from the idea that Islamist women face discrimination on the grounds of their womanhood since Islamist men could enjoy their rights in the public sphere. For the part of Islamist women it is seen that they undertake the struggle against bans vis a vis the flexible approaches of Islamist men to the issue prioritizing their interests within the political conjuncture. They have recently chosen to cooperate with feminists and other women to solve the issue rather than Islamist men. On the other hand there are Islamist women who are against the formulation of freedom demands to headscarf as a woman's right issue since such a formulation has a potential to undermine the ontological meaning of the covering.

Leyla however is content with the support of a broader sect against headscarf bans and says that feminists are transforming and they are different from the previous feminists who treat them as they are horrible creatures due to their headscarf. Filiz did not sign the proclamation despite of her conviction that the bans should be removed since she says they instrumentalized the headscarf issue for a certain politics by linking it to February 28th process. It shows that even though women are in agreement for the removal of bans their support of the case changes due to the context the bans are handled. Here a similarity is observed between the stance of Filiz here and the stance of Savran against the protest of Üzmez made by religious women. Savran problematized the lack of a criticism against conservatism and AK Party in the text written by religious women against Üzmez case and Filiz criticized the inclusion of the February 28 process matter to the headscarf issue. These instances show that religious women are expected to stay out of Islamist politics and if they will be close, it should be in the form of criticism against conservatism. Akerkar says that to sustain a coalition it is not sufficient 'to come to a minimum agreement on certain issues' but 'it is the nature of the articulation which makes solidarity or exclusion possible'. Therefore even though a discourse based on women and human rights is used by the struggle given for headscarf, depending on different articulations of the women the process is interrupted. Some feminists articulated their position on the discrimination they think is made between Islamist men and women in access to education and other opportunities in the public sphere and thus give support to the case unless the demand of removal of bans remains within the limits of womanhood. Therefore the basic clash in the approaches against headscarf as a symbol of male domination by some feminists on one side and as an essential part of

existence and as a requirement of belief by religious women seems to have potential to constitute obstruct for further cooperation.

In the discussion we made over the concepts difference, experience and knowledge benefiting from standpoint theory, we mentioned the potential of experiences to ground the construction of knowledges and the significant place the location of a person has on determination of experiences. However in order to save this study to fall into a possible essentialism that would treat experiences as evidence of truths, Scott's remark on the constructed nature of experiences was taken as a guide. The positions of the woman activists in this study are not handled as representations of certain identities but as results of interpretations of diverse experiences. Therefore differences between the women are not treated as categorical differences but differences deriving from their particular experiences. Scott says 'it is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience'; due to this statement it is not possible to talk about clear cut, stable identities but subjectivities in construction. This study by showing the contradictions, challenges of women in constructing their discourses supported this argument. The feminist motto 'personal is political' also encouraged the author to value the personal experiences of women which are in fact arise out of political contests of diverse ideologies. From this aspect experiences are constructed in a context which is not outside of politics. Then within this fragmented political environment of Turkey that the experiences are grounded upon it is inevitable that women do have diverse interests and positions. Yet the experiences do not always create divergence between the positions of women. We stated earlier that experiences of women within their own communities, be it Islamist or Kurdish, provided them a critical perspective towards the males of their communities. The critical stance assumed against the male

members of the communities led these women to engage in dialogue more with the women from other groups. For instance with regards to headscarf issue religious women have recently preferred to make cooperation with feminists. Recently the postponement of the solution of the issue by the Islamist government party AKP which claims to be waiting the appropriate time in terms of political conditions led women take the initiative. The platform 'We Are Looking After Each Other' is an example of such cooperation. Moreover the proclamation of 'February 28 Should Not Last 1000 Years' in defense of lifting of headscarf bans was signed by different feminist groups.

Depending on the reality of fragmented interests of women Akerkar defends to reflect them to feminism: "...there cannot be a feminist practice around the 'interest of a woman'. This means the context itself argues for a plural expression of feminism. The different articulations around the category 'woman' could be treated as a 'valid contextual articulation' in itself." The interests of women in Turkey are not constructed independently from their religion, ethnicity, nation or class. Therefore the exclusion of women subjects from the feminist movement on the grounds of their relation with any of these sites is the same with ignoring existence of different women subjectivities for the sake of an abstract woman ideal. Moreover by defining each of these sites as patriarchal mechanisms, some feminists impose women to relieve themselves from these mechanisms without considering that their womanhood is constructed in interaction with these sites. If the feminist argument continues to claim that all differences between positions of women derive from patriarchy, and when they get the necessary consciousness they would be able to see this reality and come together with other women, this would mean the feminist movement will continue to engage more in the exclusion of women subjects and less

trying to understand the different knowledges produced by other women and to reflect it to the practice.

#### APPENDIX A: TURKISH EXCERPTS USED IN THE STUDY

The Excerpt from Şirin Tekeli's Article On Waves of Feminism In Turkey

Yeni dalga feministleri, milliyetçi olmadıkları gibi, Kemalizmin otoriterliğine yaklaşımları da eleştireldir. Öte yandan kendilerini 'Müslüman' olarak da tanımlamazlar. Din önünde nötr ya da ateisttirler; kökten dinci kadınlar karşısında,

genellikle, Kemalist kadınların ‘yok saymacı’ tutumunu benimsememektedirler. Ama Türkiye’nin laiklikten kopması ve İslami bir devlete dönüşmesi konusunda onlar da kaygılıdır. Hem İslamiyet hem de Kürt sorunu karşısında demokratikleşmeyi savunmaktadırlar. Son olarak devlet iktidarı karşısında genellikle eleştirel ve kuşkucu bir yaklaşım sergilerler.

#### The Excerpt From Fatmagül Berktaş’s Article

İslami kuralların ve değerlerin egemen olduğu önceki dönemle yeni dönem arasında önemli farklılıkları saptamanın yanı sıra, ataerkillik temelinde şekillenen zihinsel süreklilikleri izlemek de ilginçtir. Yeni ulus devlet içinde artık kadınlar da yurttaş olarak kamusal alandaki yerlerini almaya teşvik edilseler de, kadınların erkek egemenliğinin koyduğu sınırları kırma olasılığının yarattığı derine işlemiş tehdit ve korku, erkeklerin zihinlerini rahat bırakmamaktadır. Bu tehditten duyulan korku, artık İslami kavramlarla ‘fitne’ olarak adlandırılmaktadır ama gene de, en laik ortamlarda, hatta 1970’lerin sol hareketlerinde bile İslami renkler taşıyan bir biçime bürünebilmektedir.

#### The Excerpt From Zozan Özgökçe’s Article

Ben bir Kürt kadını olarak, Van kentinin karanlık bir sokağında yürürken hem kadın olduğum için hem de Kürt olduğum için korkuyorum. Yani kadın kimliğim sebebi ile cinsel saldırıya uğrayabileceğim gibi, Kürt olduğum için de uğrayabilirim -ki birçok kadının yaşamının en derin travmaları, faillerinin devlet memuru veya devlet içindeki çete ve paramiliter grupların olduğu cinsel saldırılar ile oluşmuştur. Failler Kürt kadınlarına yönelik bu saldırılarını gerek gizli gerek aşikâr bir şekilde yapmışlardır.

#### The Excerpt From Nazife Şişman’s Book

‘Tesettürü Allah ile kul arasında bir duruşun göstergesi olarak kabul edenler için, onu değişken, yani kadın hakları gibi konjonktürel bir zemine oturtmaya çalışmak ciddi

bir duruş problemine neden olacaktır. Burada asıl husus değerler skalasındaki alt üst oluşturu. Başörtüsü bir 'kadın sorunu' olduğunda, başını örten kişi, kendini tanımlarken Allah karşısındaki konumunu değil, erkekler karşısındaki konumunu önceleyen bir kimlik ortaya koymuş olur. Yani o Allah'ın emirlerini yerine getiren bir kul değil, başörtüsü takmak zorunda olmayan erkeklerden ayrı ve belki de onlara karşı bir kadındır'

#### Turkish Version of Leyla's Account

Habitat döneminde biz onlarla ilk kez karşılaştık, farklı kesimlerle İstanbuldaki kadın STK'ları ilk kez bir araya geldiler ve biz birbirimizi ilk kez orada gördük. Herkes birbirine gardını alarak bakıyordu ama bugün bu tür toplantılarda bir arada olduğumuzda bakışlarımız daha normalleşti, dolayısıyla aynı yerlerde buluşma imkânlarımız daha arttı. Bizi oyuna getirenlerin olduğunu farkettiler, yani bazı yerlerde nasıl bir araya gelebiliyoruz çünkü aynı şeyleri düşünüyoruz, işte hepimiz yasaklara karşıyız.

#### The Excerpt From Hilal Kaplan's Letter

...feminist ve eşcinsel hareketler ile arama sadece "sen günahkarsın" deyip duvar örmek yerine onlarla konuşmayı, tebliğ ve temsil etmeyi seçiyorum çünkü bu insanların din konusundaki cehaletlerini görmeye ihtiyaçları var ve şu ana kadar çok güzel sonuçlar aldık Elhamdulillah. Örneğin en son eşcinsel/feminist insanlarla Müslümanları bir araya getiren bir atölye çalışmasında (neden Müslümanlar ve eşcinseller beraber siyaset yapamazlar sorusuna cevap vermek amacıyla düzenledik) şunu çok açıkça ifade ettik: Eşcinsel ve feminist siyaset(ler)i bir yatak odası siyasetidir ve bizatihi pornografiktir. Kendi karşı çıktığı siyasal mekanizmaları fazlasıyla yeniden üretir, zulümdür. Sonuçta çok olumlu tepkiler aldık hatta bazı

eşcinsel arkadaşların görüşlerimizi onayladığını farkettilik. Herkes İslam hususundaki cehaletini itiraf ederek devamını talep etti.

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