

# The Transition of Feminism from Kemalist Modernism to Postmodernism in Turkey

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## Abstract

*In the 1980s, the feminist movement made its voice heard by going down to streets through alternative protest campaigns and actions. Feminist groups, however, have shifted their attention from streets to the institutional works and academia in the post-1990s and this has paved the way for a change in their perception of women and women's problems in Turkey. This study attempts to analyze the journey of the feminist movement from Kemalist understanding of modernism to what is called postmodernism. The article argues that being acquainted with alternative discussions in feminism and in particular with postmodern feminism in academia, new generations of Turkish feminist groups have changed their attentions from an essentialist understanding of women to diverse women's identities. Contrary to the Kemalist understanding of modernization that envisage the emancipation of women through modern education and profession, these women came to accept that each woman has her own way of emancipation and self-realization. This article emphasizes on the role of the institutional and academic works developed by feminist groups in their transition from a monolithic and essentialist understanding of women to diverse women's identities and alternative ways of self-realization.*

## Keywords

*Women's Movement, Feminism, Postmodern Feminism, Modernism, Turkish Feminism, Turkish Women.*

## **Feminist Way of Organization**

The organizational form has always been a subject of discussion among feminist women. Feminists consider the conventional organizational form to be oppressive, authoritarian, hierarchical and thus restrictive of personality and individual participation. Feminists, who define such organizational forms as “masculine” models based on a leader’s domination, embrace a model of non-hierarchical organization in which everybody is able to participate and to have a voice. Şirin Tekeli, a prominent feminist author and activist, states that the hierarchical, centralist and leader-oriented character of the conventional organizational form “justifiably caused us to defend the absence of organization at the beginning” (Tekeli, 2004). In the 1980s, the women driving the feminist movement did not form notable institutions, except the Women’s Circle, which was in the form of a company, and shelters for women towards the end of the 1980s. The feminist movement, which had developed as a radical critique of traditional institutions and values, could not have been expected to lean towards organizations such as political parties, associations, foundations or labor unions. Tekeli (2004) states that they have turned such organizations upside down:

We have turned upside down all components of the old-style organizations, being women who are not a mass but a small group, not leaders but equal individuals, not decision-makers and its observers but co-decision makers and practitioners, and not militants who deny themselves but women whose personalities are shown respect. We have restricted mostly those who have natural “leadership” tendencies in our own organizations. Everything has changed from the meeting place to the seating order, from the way we begin to speak to the wording in a conscious and “spontaneous” manner.

It is observed that feminist women who participated in the women’s institutions that emerged throughout the 1990s were careful to remain aloof from a formal way of organization due to its hierarchical structure. It is seen that either a “home-centered organization” or a “rotational organization” has been put forward by feminists in the pursuit of an organizational form in which women, especially educated, employed and academicians, who had always taken a backseat to men, would not be relegated to a secondary role again. For example, feminist author and activist, Stela Ovdia, points to the importance of rotational organization as an ideal model for women despite the fact that it slows things down and functions very slowly (Ovdia 2006, 28). Şirin Tekeli (2004), on the other hand, suggests that a home-centered organization model enables women to better express themselves and renders possible the participation of all. Tekeli underlines that the stages of formation of the Library of Women’s Works and KADER (The Association for the Support and Training of Women Candidates) have been shaped around the home-centered small organizational structure. Similarly, the demonstrations that occupied the streets in the 1980s, such as March Against Violence, Purple Needle, We Want the Nights, Whistle, Women in Black, and Saturday Mothers were planned in houses and popularized from door to door within this organizational model.

The feminist movement had to turn towards formal institutionalizing in the 1990s, although it discussed the issue of “what kind of organizational model?” The pioneers of the movement, who thought that they had overcome the problem of social legitimacy by making their voices heard through street demonstrations, started to form institutions at the national or local levels which would be more permanent, would create real solutions to problems and would not be sin-

gle-centered (Çubukçu, 2004b). We observe a trend of widespread institutionalization on the basis of small groups in the 1990s, partly as a natural outcome of the feminist movement's nature against the single-centeredness. Nearly every women's group has institutionalized in a different way by defining their own feminisms or maintaining their own feminist existences. In this respect, it can be argued that the movement, which had separated into perspectives such as "egalitarian," "radical" and "socialist" in the 1980s, separated in the 1990s at the organizational level rather than at the level of perspectives or approaches.

### **Feminism from the Street Protests to the Institutional Works**

As mentioned above, Feminists attempted to spend their energy in establishing alternative institutions that directly touch with women's experienced problems. The Women's Library and Information Center (*Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi*) can be cited as the most important organizational success of the feminist movement in Turkey. The Women's Library and Information Center Foundation, which was officially founded by Jale Baysal, Füsün Akath, Şirin Tekeli, Füsün Yaraş and Aslı Davaz Mardin in 1989, inaugurated its library in 1990, which has been the most important archive, documentation and information center for those researchers who study women's issues. The purpose for founding the center was to collect resources and works written by and on women, and to organize various conferences, symposia and panel discussions on the subject (Mardin 2002, 191-196). The founders define the mission of the center as to better know the history of women, to present these data to new generations of re-

searchers in an organized way and to store today's written documents for the use of future generations. One of the founders, Aslı Davaz Mardin, explains the mission of the Women's Library to be "to handle the documents on women with a feminist consciousness and to pave the way for them to be implemented with a feminist consciousness" (Çımrın 2006, 146-147).

The Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation (*Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı*) emerged as an organization that defined its main field of activity as directly fighting violence against women. The idea of a shelter for women emerged after a series of activities against violence that followed the campaign named Women's Solidarity against Beating, initiated by women in 1987. As this idea matured in due course, the Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation was established in Istanbul in 1990 (Arın, 2007). The Purple Roof is a local organization operating in Istanbul; however, it often co-organizes events with women's organizations located in other cities. The main philosophy of the Purple Roof is based on the idea of "solidarity." Providing and ensuring solidarity and interaction among women is the primary aim of the organization (Yalçın and Taylı, 2007). The founders of this association think that women's shelters form one of the pillars of solidarity and therefore they attach significance to women's shelters among their activities. Since the idea of a shelter for women was first proposed by women in this organization, its name has often been identified as synonymous with the shelter. The Purple Roof generally operates in line with certain generally accepted principles in the women's movement. These principles could be juxtaposed as follows: not creating and producing hierarchy, working on a voluntary basis, sharing authority and responsibilities alternately, making decisions collectively and working for solidarity among women

(Mor Çatı, 2008).

Another organization originated by the feminist women's movement is the Association for the Support and Training of Women Candidates (*Kadın Adayları Destekleme ve Eğitim Derneği/KA-DER*) established in March 1997. Some considered the association as an outcome of the February 28 period since it was founded at a time when the February 28 decisions were issued by the military and the debate of Islamism/laicism was hot in Turkey. The foundation of KA-DER was presented by some newspapers as "girls of the Republic who will shoulder modern/secular Turkey" (Bora 2002, 116). However, KA-DER has always underlined that it would remain at an equal distance from all political parties and defines its target as "to increase the number and percentage of women in elective political and public duties, and to work for women's right to equal representation and thus to strengthen democracy and the entire society." According to the values of the Association the women to be supported should comply with certain principles. These principles can generally be summarized as being conscious of womanhood and sensitive to women's problems, attaching importance to women's solidarity, working to alleviate all kinds of discrimination against women, having innovative projects that will lead the society further, defending human rights, democracy and the constitutional state, attaching importance to the strengthening of the civil society, going against all kinds of fanaticism and racism, and behaving honestly (Ka-der, 2009).

The role of international organizations and agreements is significant in the institutionalization of the women's movement after 1990. The Turkish government's obligation to fulfill its liabilities arising from international agreements, the chain of women's summits organized by the Unit-

ed Nations in the mid-1990s, and the UN Special Sessions where the five-year practices related to the decisions taken at these summits were assessed have played important roles in the institutionalization of the women's movement in Turkey (Işık 2002, 59). Such international platforms have also formed a basis for the women's movement in Turkey to develop projects. Projects of feminist groups have also been influential in the institutionalization of the women's movement. The process that gained momentum especially after the EU accession process caused the women's movement to be accused of being "project-seeking feminism." It is noteworthy to state that this has been valid for civil societal organizations not only in Turkey but also throughout the rest of Europe.

Another organization that has become known through the projects it carried out (and it is still continuing its existence through notable projects) is the Flying Broom (*Uçan Süpürge*), which aims to establish communication among women. The Flying Broom was founded and began its activities in 1996 with the support, firstly of a women's group based in Netherland, and then of the Embassy of Canada. Eventually, the organization gradually enlarged its scope, thanks to the international projects it undertook, and gained nation-wide recognition (Kardam and Ecevit 2002, 93). The aim of the association is defined as "to enhance gender equality consciousness, provide information and training to empower women, and contribute to the development of efficient policies for solving women's problems stemming from inequality" (Uçan Süpürge, 2008). The Flying Broom defines itself as a "communication center" that has comprehended the importance and influence of communication (Güner, 2011). Although the Flying Broom is a women's organization, it develops communication and cooperation,

not only with women's organizations, but also with other civil societal organizations as well (Ergin 2006, 45).

The Flying Broom also carries out preparation work on behalf of Turkey for international events. For example, it conducted the preparation work on behalf of women in Turkey for the fifth year of the "The Fourth World Conference" on Women organized by the UN in Beijing in 2000. It organized workshops in Ankara with the participation of representatives of women's organizations from different cities of Turkey to get prepared for the *Beijing+5 United Nations* meeting where the past five years would be assessed and prepared a report on the most recent and most notable issues, problems and solution offers concerning women in Turkey (Kardam and Ecevit 2002, 98). Through these kind of activities the feminist women who have been organized around the Flying Broom come together with women from different social and cultural backgrounds as well as ideologies or identities. This, indeed, paves the way for the development of an interconnection among the women from different segments of society and thus a ground of tolerance and mutual-respect.

Another typical example of project-seeking feminist organizations is the Women's Human Rights-New Ways Association (*Kadının İnsan Hakları-Yeni Çözümler Derneği*). It was founded in 1993 and has gained advisory status with the Economic & Social Council of the UN. The association operates to ensure women's effective participation in the social and political lives as independent individuals and equal citizens, and carries out researches on the problems experienced by women in terms of human rights and solution proposals, and strives to influence the national and international decision-making mechanisms for women's

rights. The association produces projects, provides training and develops publications on issues such as violence against women, education, economic rights, legal rights, sexuality, fertility rights and girls' rights (Kadının İnsan Hakları, 2009). It cooperates not only with the domestic governmental agencies but also with international organizations in order to receive support for the projects it develops at the local and national level. The association was awarded the 1999 Leading Solutions Award by the Association for Women in Development (AWID).

Another organization founded by feminist women and developed at the national level after 1990 is the Women's Legal Rights Commissions (*Kadın Hukuku Komisyonları*) within the body of the Union of Turkish Bar Associations. Women's Legal Rights Commissions, whose number is over fifty all around the country, provide those women who have been subjected to violence with legal assistance (KSSGM, 2007). These commissions work to ensure the implementation of the rights given to women through the Law No. 4320, which seeks to protect women against domestic violence. As parts of this organization, the Women's Rights Implementation Center in Istanbul and the Women's Counseling Center in the Ankara Courthouse have been carrying out notable activities since 1990 (Işık 2002, 51). These Centers provides female victims who have been subjected to violence and abuse of rights with legal and psychological counseling. Besides this, it carries out documentation works by collecting court decisions and various publications and aims to reach a larger audience by producing periodical and non-periodical publications. The Ankara Women's Counseling Center offers legal counseling support not only to women living in Ankara but also to those living in different cities of the country and even abroad (Kaplan 2008, 128-133).

Besides the above-mentioned organizations active at the national level, numerous women's organizations operating at the local level have also emerged after 1990 within the feminist movement. Women's Center (*Kadın Merkezi/KA-MER*), one of such local organizations, was founded in Diyarbakır in 1997 and has carried out very important activities towards women within feminist framework (Akkoç 2002, 213-215). Another local group of women in Van has been publishing a magazine named Purple Pencil (*Mor Kalem*), organized around an organization named Van Women's Association (*Van Kadınlar Derneği/VAKAD*). Indeed, as interest in women's problems spread throughout the country after the 1990s, various local feminist groups came to the scene to struggle for the rights of women. Numerous micro-scale women's groups have manifested their own feminist stances either under the umbrella of an association or around a magazine

### **Feminist Publications in the Post-1990s: From Monolithic Tone to Diverse Voices**

The feminist women's movement, along with institutional activities in the forms of associations, foundations and corporations, has also performed notable activities in the field of publication. Magazines that emerged in the 1990s and the 2000s belonged not to certain feminist movements, but to certain groups. In the 1980s, however, magazines were the transmitters of different feminist perspectives and each of egalitarian, socialist or radical feminist group was centered on a magazine (Çubukçu, 2004a). Magazines published by feminist women in the 1990s represented different styles of activity and different regions rather than different feminist perspectives. Magazines published by

feminist women in the 1990s and the 2000s such as "*Cımbız, Kadın Postası, Dolaşan Mavi Çorap, Eksik Etek, Çağdaş Kadın, Kültür ve Siyasette Feminist Yaklaşımlar, Kadın Bülteni*" are the magazines published by small feminist groups coming together either in certain organizations/institutions or in certain cities and regions. Therefore, one can say that such magazines would not be long-lasting. However, the monthly national magazine *Feminine Newspaper: Monday (Kadınlara Mahsus Gazete: Pazartesi)* has managed to become an important feminist publication that is worth stressing since it has managed to continue its existence for more than ten years within the feminist movement.

*Pazartesi* had been published between March 1995 and April 2006 as a monthly politic-actual news magazine. One of the authors of the journal Filiz Koçali (2002) defines *Pazartesi* as "a magazine aiming to popularize feminism and to stimulate a wider group of women." Instead of approaching issues as a homogeneous group, every individual in *Pazartesi* approached them from their own perspectives. One of the editors of the magazine Handan Koç (2008) states; "We always kept our pages open to different ideas within feminism." For this reason, different perspectives and different interpretations have found a chance to be published on the pages of the magazine. She indicates that both suburban women and Islamic women could find themselves in the magazine and they attempted to interact with them (Ibid). The magazine, by conducting a long interview with Sibel Eraslan, the head of Istanbul Women's Commission of religious Welfare Party, attempted to analyze the problems that veiled women experience from their own perspective and through their narrations.

*Pazartesi* tried to preserve its feminine perspective during the February 28 period

through which Turkish society became polarized around Islam and secularism, and managed to consider the issue of woman to be an issue outside of this polarization. This process is explicated by one of the authors of the magazine as follows:

The February 28 process, which started long before the February 28, split women as well. February 28, when roughly summarized, pointed to political Islam as the ultimate threat and to the Kurdish problem as the second, and asked for the support of civilians in the fight against these groups. Many women, feminists, supported February 28 in one way or another. However, February 28 became a consolidating development for *Pazartesi*, rather than a splitting one. Today, I see that we evaluated February 28 very accurately, and this has been one of our most important achievements. Although we were aware of the fact that every right-minded feminist should struggle against political Islam, we did not fall into the trap of the official ideology, Kemalism and the repressive mindset. As we were at odds with political Islam ideologically, we argued against the exclusion and seclusion of women due to the headscarf. We criticized the presentation of civil marriage and “modernism” to women as the way of emancipation. While almost all oppositional groups missed their footings in front of February 28, I believe that what we defended is also a contribution to feminism (Koçali 2002, 78-79).

The consideration of women’s problems by *Pazartesi* before and beyond all kinds of ideological engagements and disputes is a significant indicator that shows the transformation of the feminist women’s movement. When one considers the fact that distinctions like Kemalism/anti-Kemalism or laicism/Islamism are in fact the camouflaging guard plates of a power contestation, it is of the utmost importance for the actors who

pioneer the women’s movement to keep seeing women’s problems as the primary problem without falling into traps in this fight. It would not be wrong to argue that *Pazartesi*, in this respect, showed a significant success.

Yet another magazine in line for being an important publication of the feminist women’s movement in the 2000s is *Amargi*, published by Amargi Women’s Academy. *Amargi* is a theoretical-political feminist magazine that has been published since June 2006. *Amargi*, which means “freedom” and “return to mother” in the Sumerian language, is a quarterly magazine and exhibits an attitude similar to that of *Pazartesi* presented above. In the first issue of *Amargi*, an article written by Hidayet Tuksal, whose name is connected with “Islamic feminism,” was included. As early as its first issue, *Amargi* addressed the headscarf issue as its cover subject. The articles in this issue generally argued that the headscarf ban is a violation of women’s human rights. Fatma Nevin Vargün (2006) asserts that the headscarf with its modern appearance bridges the articulation of Muslim women in public life. According to Vargün, “those women who are permitted to study and go out and work with the headscarf are able to participate in life. They can take part in life since they enter into the public sphere, although in the veiled manner. This is a positive advancement.”

Indeed, it is possible to claim that the feminist women’s movement seems to be in an intensive interconnection with society through both organizational and publication activities. This makes it possible for feminist groups to perceive the real problems of women from their own perspectives without falling into the trap of ideological separations between Islamism and Kemalism. As the movement comes into contact with diverse women, it acquires a grasp of problems of different women and becomes

the voice of struggle against these problems. This, eventually, will make feminism more acceptable and understandable by the larger masses in Turkey.

### **Feminism in the Academia: the Contact of Feminists with Diverse Faces of Women's Problems**

Feminism today in most places of the world is not only a social movement, but also a distinct scientific discipline and perspective in academic life. It could be stated that the feminist perspective developed in academia stays away from the positivist/modernist approach based on causation and determinism. In American universities where the postmodern way of thinking is very weak, it is known that of those academicians who are inclined to this way of thinking most are feminist academicians. For postmodernism provides feminist academicians with the opportunity to develop a new epistemological approach, a new knowledge-production and a new theory going beyond positivist knowledge based on empirical findings. In the feminist academic works influenced especially by Lacan's and Derrida's philosophy, French feminism and the psychoanalytic approach, observable and measurable facts are outdistanced and women's life experiences, histories and subconscious become the fields of study and, thus, more complex processes and causes of women's subordination are explored (SJGS, 2000).

Women's studies entered into the agenda of the academia in Turkey as late as the 1970s. There had been a very limited number of studies on women until these years except the studies conducted by such female academicians as Nermin Abadan Unat

(1981), Tezer Taşkiran (1973) and Şirin Tekeli (1977). A set of studies emerged in the 1960s and the 1970s which addressed the issue of woman mostly from a modernist perspective. In this framework, especially those issues like women's position in the development index and in the country's development were studied.

With the development of the feminist movement, the issue of woman began to become an area of interest in academia. Beginning from the early 1990s, research centers or departments on women emerged in various universities in Turkey. Today, departments or centers on women's studies are found in more than 30 Turkish universities. It is possible to state that the fields of study and practices at these centers have been shaped in line with the interests and standpoints of people working in or contributing to these centers. For this reason, although it is difficult to argue that all centers operate with a feminist perspective, it could be stated that these centers are sensitive to women's problems. In general, the activities of the centers could be grouped into the organizing of national or international level panels, conferences and seminars, the production of educational materials, the carrying out researches to explore and spread the knowledge on women's studies, the preparing of publications, and the organizing of various courses oriented towards women. The target groups of these centers are mostly students, women's organizations, professional organizations, political parties, labor unions, public institutions, municipalities and people from certain occupational groups (doctors, judicial authorities, constables etc.).

It could be stated that women educated in Women's Studies generally acquire consciousness about women's problems connected to diverse reasons, womanhood and the feminist movement. Satı Atakul (2002,



307), who received her MA degree from the Department of Women's Studies at Ankara University, says "the department served for me as a gate opening to my womanhood and to other women, and I started to hold on to life and I became a feminist there." She also tells the story of how, through the discussions, readings and researches in the department, students started to come face-to-face with women more, to understand their problems, and to closely observe what being a woman meant in the Turkish society. All these processes paved the way for them to discover themselves

We went through a preparation period in order to be able to write our grandmothers' story. We interviewed them if they were alive, interviewed our mothers and our relatives, we recorded videos, compiled what remained from their belongings such as recipes, expressions they used frequently, trappings and photos etc. One of the requirements of the study was to visit their graves. I had my longest and most intimate conversation with my mother thanks to this. A woman said in her article: "I was late to my mother, I don't want to be late to other women." I guess that one of my most important discoveries during this study was that I apprehended this. This operation of discovery had a staggering didactic content for each of us. The stories of our grandmothers touched us in these meetings and pulled at our heartstrings. At the end, I believe everybody was more acquainted with others (Ibid, 316-317).

The last sentence of the quote gives important clues about the outcomes of the points of contact that the feminist movement has established with society through research centers. Feminists, through the organizations they created, particularly the research centers in universities, have found the opportunity to make more contact with

other women living in their society and, thus, they eventually began to better comprehend the fact that they are the actors of the same problem in different parts of society. Some women who in the 1980s used to say "never with an Islamic woman, even though she is a feminist," noticed in the 1990s, although they were dispersed to different political positions, different ethnic groups, different beliefs, different occupations, different classes and different statuses. They recognized that all women are above all "women" and this identity actually underlies numerous problems. This, therefore, paved the way for feminist women to eventually diverge from the modernist Kemalist understanding; in other words, to step down from their ivory towers by intermingling with society more. As a matter of fact, this points to the transformation in the elitist character of feminism in the 1980s. It would not be wrong to argue that as feminists noticed the fact that women of other groups were before anything and anybody else "women," the feminist movement became more sensitive to the problems experienced by women from different parts of society.

Academic women's studies can generally be grouped under two main perspectives: modernist and feminist approaches. The modernist approach, although sensitive to women's problems, is an approach that explores and questions issues such as women's educational level, their modernization, equality between women and men, employment opportunities, etc. The feminist approach, however, gets off the ground questioning the power-based academic knowledge. Departing from the idea that knowledge, method and academia are at the same time engaged with power, it questions all kinds of the sources of power (Sancar, 2003). The feminist approach that interrogates the social, political, economic and cultural underpinnings of power naturally

develops different attitudes towards scientificity, the methodology of scientific work, and its problematics. When we consider the fact that feminism has been identified with the critique of patriarchal culture, it becomes apparent that the academic feminist approach should above all be critical and skeptical, and should stand aloof from the de facto suppositions of the modernist/positivist approach.

Not only in Turkey but also in the academic worlds of developed countries in general, it is of a special importance for researchers and academicians who conduct women's studies with a feminist perspective to unveil women's "life stories." This approach is a deviation from positivism, as emphasized above. The source of knowledge, according to the positivist approach, which supposes that "reality narrates itself," is the object itself. Two researchers who use the same scientific tools end up with the same knowledge. The relationship between the researcher and the object that is being researched is no different from that between a physicist and the physical phenomena. Any kind of interaction is beside the point. However, in the methodological disciplines that emerged through the influence of the postmodern approach, there exists a reciprocal interaction between the subject (researcher) and the object, and the knowledge is something that emerges as a result of this interaction. Feminist researchers, departing from this approach, believe that theory and practice is the same thing, or in other words, the theoretical knowledge is nothing but the experienced life histories. A feminist researcher, as she excavates down deep in the life stories she is exploring, interacts and coalesces with them, and experiences the process of "mutual knowing" with the people explored (Hawkesworth, 1989). The knowledge to be revealed by the feminist researcher, therefore, does not pretend to,

and cannot, be "objective," as it is the case in positivism.

The reading women's subconscious or, in other words, women's subjective experiences constitutes an important field of study in academic feminism. Departing from this point of view, an attempt is being made to bring the "oral history" approach, which is based on narrative, into the social sciences in general, and into women's studies in particular. Aynur İlyasoğlu (2006: 97), one of the prominent feminist academics who have been making an effort towards this, defines the "oral history" method as "the gathering of history from individuals' memories through their verbal (oral) expressions." According to İlyasoğlu, oral history is both one of the oldest (since it is pre-scriptural) and the newest and most important methods (since it was developed in social sciences quite recently). Oral history reveals the hidden voices, lost connections, depressed feelings, thoughts and experiences of the subconscious. Besides, the oral history method enables the collection of more integrated data since it is an interdisciplinary approach. An example where the oral history method was used is the Pilot Project of Women's Oral History in Turkey, carried out by a group of researchers from various disciplines for the Women's Library and Information Center. In this project, oral history research was conducted with women aged above 70. Women's oral narratives were recorded and analyses were carried out by considering their life histories, families, living standards, professions, educational backgrounds, spare time activities, relations with religion, with the world, and with health and legal institutions, friendships, social activities, organization, politics, sexuality, violence, migration, stratification and writing habits (Ibid).

In short, the body of women's studies which emerged in the universities in Turkey

does not limit this field only to a research field, but at the same time, works for the emergence of an activist group of academicians through this field. It could be stated that this group is undergoing a process in which it interacts with the research subjects through which it collects data and forms an integral bond with them.

### **The Journey of Feminists from Kemalist Modernism to Postmodernism**

The Kemalist understanding of modernization is based upon a single truth and strives to make society believe in that way. This understanding of modernization, which was developed under the influence of 19<sup>th</sup> century positivism, adopts a single way of existence. According to this belief system, reality, accuracy and validity belong to what is modern. The traditional is wrong and unacceptable. Everything that is connected to the traditional is seen from this point of view. This understanding of modernization, naturally, sees woman's existence as depending on her becoming modern, that is, her becoming a well educated and professional woman. The Kemalist understanding of modernization, departing from this epistemological approach, vertically divides the society roughly into two: "those who found the true path and thus are saved" and "those who are ignorant and backward." Throughout the history of the Republic, the latter group has been oppressed, insulted and subordinated by the Kemalist elite. This elitist approach, unfortunately, has taken hold of generations of women in universities, professional life and the bureaucracy. Republican women have always been at war against those women whom they accused of being backward since they did not fall within the Kemalist pattern (Çaha, 2010).

It would not be wrong to argue that this is the dominant understanding that had been prevalent until the 1980s among educated women, especially women in the academia. For the first time, in the 1980s, feminists developed a discourse that dissociated them from Kemalists. However, despite this break, feminist women did not adequately protect and support those women who were stigmatized by Kemalist women in the 1980s. Yet in the 2000s, as the feminist movement in Turkey became institutionalized and climbed down to various strata of society, feminist women began to move away from the Kemalist understanding of modernization that championed a uniform and single truth, and to become more sensitive to different realities, to different voices and different claims developed by women. Especially with the adoption of the newly-emerged approaches in the social sciences by Turkish feminists, feminist movement in Turkey started to become more and more open to different ways of existence in Turkey. The postmodern scientific approaches that emerged throughout the world (hermeneutics, phenomenology, ontology, existentialism, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, etc.) have been rapidly moving away from the world of positivism that has a single truth (Nicholson, 1990). Naturally, institutions where the diversity of scientific approaches resonates most are universities. Various postmodern approaches have attracted feminists in Turkey, as is the case throughout the entire globe, and rendered them more sensitive to different truths. An approach called "post-feminism," which criticizes feminism through the set of ideas provided by postmodernism, has emerged within the feminist movement (Modleski, 1990). It would not be wrong to argue that postmodernism has been most influential among Islamists who have been searching for legitimacy against Kemalism,

and among feminists who have been searching for legitimacy against the male-centered uniform cultural codes of the Turkish society.

The primary issue on which feminists disagree with Kemalist modernists is the “headscarf” issue. While the Kemalist modernist approach sees the headscarf as a symbol of traditionality and reactionary attitudes towards modernization and thus strives to exclude veiled women from the public sphere, most feminist academics consider the headscarf to be a medium that brings women to the public sphere and thus liberates women from traditional familial barricades. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this way of reading embodies a modernist expectation. In other words, feminists tolerate the headscarf with the expectation that it will modernize women. However, Turkish feminist researchers and academicians who take into consideration the post-modern approaches and the internal diversity of global feminism, see different social stances including veiling as windows opening to multiple truths and different ways of existence. Seeing the headscarf as one of the manifestations of the multiplicity of truths is a brave thing for the generations who have undergone the socialization process within the Kemalist framework and its uniform understanding of modernity. Since this signifies running counter to Kemalism and a radical break, it is difficult to say that feminists, like all other secular groups, are willing to show courage for this. It should be noted, however, that a feminism, in Turkey or elsewhere, that mentions the multiplicity of languages, cultures, experiences, socializations, beliefs and styles, should also admit the multiplicity of truths as well. Otherwise, it is condemned to be a uniform modernist attitude and approach.

It needs to be underlined that the empa-

thetic attitude has significantly differentiated feminist women from Kemalists after 1990. Feminists, as they moved away from Kemalism, became more capable of understanding women from different identities, classes, ethnicities, statuses and beliefs. In this process, it is possible to observe that feminist women have become more sensitive to Kurdish women and religious women, who are excluded from the public sphere due to their headscarves. The magazine *Amargi*, as early as its first issue, made the “headscarf” issue its cover subject and examined the issue from a perspective very different from that of Kemalist women. Fatma Nevin Vargün (2006) says, “acting with a presupposition that ‘if Sharia comes, all women will be forced to cover their heads and these women will be tasked that day with forcing us to veil’ hinders and even completely eradicates empathy from the very beginning.”

In the same issue, Zeynep Direk, in her article entitled “On the Headscarf Ban,” harshly criticizes the European Court of Human Rights for their finding justified the decision of the Turkish government to dismiss Leyla Şahin from university due to her headscarf. Direk (2006), from a critical perspective, argues that the headscarf indeed provides women with a sort of opportunity to be present and participate in the public sphere:

*Removal of those intellectuals who are capable of deciphering the male dominance in religion from universities due to their headscarves is of course a major loss for feminism. If our existence belongs both to the profane and sacred worlds, it is the task of feminist criticism to strive to critically open the ways of presence in both of these spheres as women experiencing their own adventures. The enlightenment within Islam is once more expressed in women’s de-*

*mands to receive education and to realize themselves. Moreover, this enlightenment paves the way for the sacred to be re-read from women's perspective. When the feminist consciousness does not draw the boundaries of enlightenment so narrow, as only the struggle between the positive sciences and faith, then the headscarf will cease to be the symbol of backwardness and of a lifestyle running counter to the advancement of reason.*

The above lines imply that since women are situated both in the sacred and secular worlds, they could present examples of existence and self-realization in both of these spheres. The article also includes an expectation that women who wear the headscarf and are attempting to take part in modern institutions will play a critical role in the transformation of the traditional interpretation of Islam. Therefore, on the one hand, the headscarf is seen as a way of existence, and on the other hand, it is the focus of a pragmatic expectation. Direk writes, in the same article, "the expelling of veiled women from universities is for me a barrier in front of the enlightenment movement, and it is also an anti-feminist act since it ignores the violence committed to the female body" (Ibid). According to an understanding that has recently been widespread among feminists, veiled students and women who would like to be employed with their headscarves are indeed undergoing a kind of modernization process. When considering the dilemma of women and modernization, it could be stated that feminists in Turkey oscillate between the uniform modernist and the multidimensional postmodern ways of existence.

It would not be inaccurate to argue that the feminist movement in Turkey has been gradually evolving from the feminism of the

1980s, throughout which it had modernist overtones, to a postmodern direction. When the adventure of the feminist movement over the last two or three decades is examined, various changes are notable. The feminist movement, which was on a quest for legitimacy in the 1980s, had naturally to hit the streets and resonated in the streets as a new voice. By doing this, it also declared its divergence from Kemalism and socialism, out of which it evolved. In the 2000s, however, the feminist movement tending to increasingly institutionalize, carried out important projects through original organizations and, as an outcome of these, gained a certain level of self-confidence. The feminist movement has increasingly stopped being a reactionary and discursive movement through organizations and projects, and has turned into a movement using teamwork in an attempt to cure social problems.

The generations that have imported feminism to Turkey naturally brought different approaches within feminism, too. In that respect, in the 1980s, feminists were concentrated around three main approaches and each of them tried to make its voice heard through its own publication. The distinction among feminists during those dates was nothing but differences in terms of "perspectives" and "approaches." However, in the 2000s, we could say that feminists gathered around common problems, and the distinction among them was no longer a matter of perspective, but a matter of "frequency" and "team." As feminists intermingled with the society, they began to concern themselves with more real problems. While there were only three feminist publications in the 1980s (*Kadınca*, *Feminizm* and *Kaktüs*), today there exist numerous different associations and publications at the local level. However, as indicated above, this divergence is a matter of different teams. In addition, the movement, which was active only in

the metropolitan cities of the country in the 1980s, managed in the 2000s to spread into the periphery. Feminists are now active not only in cities like Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir, but also in cities such as Diyarbakır, Antalya and Van. With the spread of feminism, which emerged in the big cities, to the periphery, the periphery was prepared to be sensitive to women's problems and rights. One can correlate the fact that there are women members of parliament coming from cities like Ağrı and Van, which are considered to be conservative, to this preparation. The movement has also been undergoing a transformation in the sense that it does not totally consist of educated and professional women anymore. Now, women from different classes, professions and statuses take part in the movement. From this point, we can infer that the feminist movement is gradually ceasing to be an elitist movement and is turning into a truly social movement.

In the 1980s, sexual freedom was the main theme within the feminist movement. With sexual freedom, it was meant that women should take control of their own bodies. It can be said that this was the main theme prevalent in the writings of Duygu Asena, a popular feminist columnist during the 1980s. However, in the 2000s, it seems that the single most important women's problem was not considered to be sexual freedom, but the struggle against a world of other problems. It has been discovered by feminists that women are oppressed for different reasons behind different walls (classes, religious groups, communities etc.). Women of different classes, different ethnicities, and different beliefs are being subordinated for various reasons peculiar to their respective groups (Anthias, 1983). The feminist movement of the 2000s became more aware of this. Therefore, feminists began to stake out a claim on the headscarf issue, although not as much as veiled women

did and so was the case on the problems of Kurdish women.

A notable example of the feminist enthusiasm towards the women outside of them is the attempts of some feminist women to support the struggles against headscarf ban. It was indeed amazing not only for Kemalists but also for some old-fashioned feminist groups when two feminist women attracted attention to the headscarf ban by wearing headscarves in front of the media projectors. Following the call of conservative *Yenişafak* newspaper under the heading "Women's Solidarity against the Ban," three journalists like Nazlı Ilıcak, Nuray Mert and Leyla İpekçi together with two feminist authors of *Amargi* magazine, namely Ülkü Özakin and Pınar Selek, posed for the cameras with headscarves on April 2, 2007 (*Yenişafak*, 2007). The attempt of secular and feminist women to wear headscarf in order to draw attention to the ban on headscarf was the most outstanding support given by secular women to their religious fellows. This was, indeed, a matter of courage besides being a fundamental revolution for feminists in approaching their religious counterparts and their values.

In conclusion, we can say that feminist groups who made their voice being heard firstly around the mid-1980s in the street, have come to push their mark over numerous successful organizations and institutional activities that created lasting effects. As indicated above, the issue of women is today no longer an issue that concerns only feminists, but has entered into the agendas of different groups. Even though each group defines its own "women's problem" and points to a specific dimension of the problem, it is apparent that they react to common chronic problems experienced by women in the same manner. It would not be wrong to argue that the feminist movement

has played a significant role in this. On the other hand, the fact that the diverse women's problems depend on diverse social, economic and cultural contexts, has not only encouraged feminist women but also women from other sections of the Turkish society to be more tolerant towards, and enthusiastic about, the alternative ways of self-realiza-

tions and emancipations for women. This is, indeed, a fundamental deviation from Kemalist understanding of modernization which still marks the pattern of change and values associated with this change throughout the Republican period which started in 1923.

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