

**PATHS, BORDERS AND BRIDGES: IMPACT OF ETHNICITY AND RELIGION ON  
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN TURKEY**

**FERİDE ACAR  
GÜLBANU ALTUNOK  
Middle East Technical University**

**[DRAFT: Please Do not Quote or Cite Without Permission]**

**Paper prepared for the QUING Conference  
October 2-3, 2009, Budapest**

**Deliverable No. 47/49: Series of explanatory country and thematic comparative reports in WHY**

## **PATHS, BORDERS AND BRIDGES: IMPACT OF ETHNICITY AND RELIGION ON WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN TURKEY**

*Feride Acar*

*Gülbanu Altunok*

### **Introduction:**

This paper aims to assess the impact of the intersection of gender with ethnicity and religion on the development of collaborative activism on issues concerning gender equality in Turkey. Throughout our research, in the context of QUING, we had studied policies on gender and equality and their preparation processes with respect to both state and civil society action as well as the interaction of the two.

For QUING, identification of alliances among women across the state and civil society and unpacking the nature of such alliances is important in order “to investigate the extent to which these make a difference to the content and quality of gender equality policies.”<sup>1</sup> QUING has focused on the “institutionalized aspects of the interface between civil society and state actors”<sup>2</sup>, and has attempted to analyze policy documents by using ‘frame and voice’ methodology to assess the contours and meanings of ‘gender equality’ discourse among different actors at national contexts.

In the European context, debates on the intersection of gender with other complex and multilayered inequalities based on ethnicity and religion have gained increasing currency at institutional levels both within the state and civil society. As prominent examples of this one can point to debates such as the headscarf issue or the status of migrant women. that are increasingly articulated in policy documents produced by the state and the civil society. In Turkey, although gender equality debates have increasingly loomed in the background of politics and social change, and ethnicity and religion have been increasingly recognized in civil society more as forces unpacking socio-political dynamics, awareness of the intersection of the latter two with gender has not been as prominent, particularly at the institutional level. Therefore, texts that focus on concrete reflections of intersectionality and policies based on such an awareness are limited, if not entirely lacking.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Walby, Sylvia. 2007. A Review of Theory and Methodology for the Analysis of the Implications of Intersectionality for Gender Equality Policies in the EU. D13 and D14, WP 16, STRIQ.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> This research relies on the data and material uncovered by various parts of QUING research, particularly, the Issue Histories (Deliverable No: 19), LARG Country Studies (Deliverable No: 40), WHY: Country Context Study (Deliverable No: 41) and the STRIQ Report (Deliverable No:47) which elaborated on the interface between gender equality policies and other issues in Turkey.

Therefore, better understanding of the positions, divisions and coalitions among groups in the civil society is essential in order to assess the terrain and gauge the potentialities of equality policy making.

In this study, we have attempted to discuss the planes of coalition and consensus and/or the demarcation lines between various strands of women's activism in Turkey by looking into the evolution dynamics as well as the extent and nature of interactions among women's organizations in order to complement QUING text analyses.

### **Theory:**

Political struggles for the recognition of different identities, social, cultural, sexual and political existences of different social groups picked up pace in mid 1980s in Western societies and in different parts of the world. Differing sociological paradigms and political theories have sought to understand the dynamics of emerging forms of political activism at macro and micro levels and have evaluated their impact on politics, policies and political visions.<sup>4</sup> It has been argued that the emerging political struggles differ from their traditional counterparts in terms of their agendas, action strategies, their relatively flat organizational structures, and modes of belonging.<sup>5</sup> An important aspect of these political movements has been the shared concern in relation to diverse issues and identity politics. These concerns have involved claims from feminist, gay-liberation activists and environmentalists, have brought issues like environment, human rights, globalization into public agenda and challenged many classical notions on 'identity', 'agency' and 'citizenship'.

The emerging forms of political activism were conceptualized as a good opportunity to challenge existing paradigms on equality, equality policies and the meaning and operation of citizenship in political systems.<sup>6</sup> For Iris Marion Young<sup>7</sup>, for example, the 'politics of difference' can be understood as a good source for a discussion-based politics, in which participants aim to cooperate, reach understanding and do justice to those who suffer from disadvantageous social positions, division of labor, normalized legal, cultural and historical standards, and therefore feel alienated and excluded from the political system.

While the insertion of difference and new political claims based on new forms of identities have been celebrated by some scholars, the controversial impacts of the politics of difference/identity have also

---

<sup>4</sup> Mayer Zald and John McCarthy. ed. 1987. *Social Movements in an Organizational Society*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books; Anthony Oberschall. 1993. *Social Movements: Ideologies, Interests and Identities*. New Brunswick: Transaction; David Meyer and Sidney Tarrow. 1998. ed. *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century*. Lanham, MD; Douglas McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald. 1996. *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Taylor, Charles. 1994. The Politics of Recognition, in *Multiculturalism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press; Kymlicka, Will. 1995. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford University Press: Oxford.

<sup>7</sup> Young, Iris Marion. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

been noted. One of the important interventions, in that sense, has been put forward by Nancy Fraser, who conceptualizes political transformations as a move from the ‘politics of redistribution’, political claims based on structural inequalities to the ‘politics of recognition’, political claims based on cultural differences and group identities. The move from politics of redistribution to recognition, she argues, paradoxically has occurred despite—or because of—an acceleration of economic globalization, and radically exacerbating economic inequalities all over the world. In this context, Fraser argues, “questions of recognition are serving less to supplement, complicate and enrich redistributive struggles than to marginalize, eclipse and displace them.”<sup>8</sup>

Another point with regards to negative impacts of emerging identity/difference claims is that, recognition struggles have not seemed to promote respectful interaction within increasingly multicultural contexts, but rather has drastically simplified and reified group identities and even led to violent clashes of multiple identities. This argument has been supported especially with the revival of civil wars and ethnic conflicts in Eastern Europe in 1990s.<sup>9</sup> In that regard, the politics of identity/difference have not promoted a more just and democratic political process in practice in these contexts, but has rather revived primordial identities or reproduced new forms of identities, which are conceived as static, passively formed and irreconcilable with other personalities, groups or cultures.

At another level, it has been also increasingly suggested that, with the emergence of politics of difference, identities have become more active and flexible constructions; they have been increasingly considered as multi-layered and fragmented. Benhabib terms this fact as “the fungibility of identity” and argues that the continuous and inevitable fragmentation of identities has made it almost impossible to develop a common vision of radical transformation.<sup>10</sup>

In exploring the impacts and meaning of politics of difference, Young noted that one has to distinguish between the two versions. The first version, which she calls as ‘politics of positional difference’, is a cause of structural inequality and injustice and is central to the arguments of feminist, anti-racist, and gay liberation activists of the 1980s who have argued for equality and inclusion. The ‘politics of cultural difference’, on the other hand, has gained currency in the 1990s and focused on differences concerning nationality, ethnicity and religion and has emphasized “the cultural distinctness of individuals.” Both forms of politics, Young argues, challenge the vision that tend to identify equality with

---

<sup>8</sup> Fraser, Nancy. 2000. Rethinking Recognition, *New Left Review* 3, May-June.

<sup>9</sup> Benhabib, Seyla. 1995. From Identity Politics to Social Feminism: A Plea for the Nineties, *Philosophy of Education* 22-36.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

sameness and require moral intervention from “public and civic institutions to take into account individual or group differences, treat them differently for the sake of promoting equality and freedom”<sup>11</sup>

However, Young also points out to a number of critical limits with regards to the politics of cultural difference. First, she argues, “structural injustices do build on perceived cultural differences, a politics of cultural differences and its emphasis on liberty does not make visible enough issues of structural inequalities.”<sup>12</sup> Secondly, “the politics and political theory of cultural differences tends to focus on what state policy properly should allow, forbid or remain silent about...[they] tend to ignore civil society as a crucial site for working on injustice.”<sup>13</sup> Finally, “the politics of cultural difference obscures many issues concerning gender and justice that are matters of structural inequality.”<sup>14</sup>

Although the two versions of politics of difference are sometimes intermeshed and diffused in practice in terms of their formations and formulations, Young’s critical intervention is important since it proposes “to re-focus [academic, political and policy] attention to group differences generated from structural power, the division of labor, and constructions of the normal and the deviant, as they continue also to reflect on conflicts over national, ethnic, or religious difference.”<sup>15</sup>

The questions of identity, difference and multiculturalism have impacted feminist research and women’s activism as well. First of all, since 1980s, the multitude of women’s activisms having diverse agendas and issue concerns has emerged in many contexts. It has been pointed out that the politics of difference has spilled over its effects on feminism by not only highlighting -the differences among women, but also by pointing out to the particularities of women outside the mainstream understandings of ‘the woman’. Feminist discourses on diversity, multiculturalism and identity, in that sense, has become a playfield for women outside the ‘heterosexual-white-middle-class-women’.<sup>16</sup> Questions on identity and difference have thus become more problematic on the issue of gender, since they are -located through cross-cutting forms-

In this regard, with the suspension of the category of ‘women’ in feminist analyses, some feminists have pointed out to the danger of losing epistemological and political foundations of feminism.

---

<sup>11</sup> Young, Iris Marion. 2007. Structural Injustice and the Politics of Difference, in Anthony Simon Laden et al, eds., *Multiculturalism and Political Theory*, University of Illinois: Cambridge: 62-63.

<sup>12</sup> On the first point, she has explained, “many conflicts over cultural toleration or accommodation in contemporary liberal democracies...occur within a context of structural inequality between the dominant groups and cultural minorities. What is at stake in many of these conflicts is not simply freedom of expression and association, but substantively equal opportunity for individuals from marginalized groups to develop and exercise their capacities, and to have meaningful voice in the governance of the institutions whose roles and policies condition their lives.” Young, Iris Marion, 2007, Structural Injustice and the Politics of Difference, in Anthony Simon Laden et al, eds., *Multiculturalism and Political Theory*, University of Illinois: Cambridge: 86.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, 89

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, 91.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> Spelman, Elizabeth. 1988. *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. Beacon Press

Furthermore, it is argued that, it is necessary to insert ‘woman’ as a categorical and political unit into analyses and to conceptualize a strong subject capable of representing all women for feminist politics.<sup>17</sup> The question of identity for the capacity of representation has therefore also become increasingly problematic for feminist politics.<sup>18</sup>

Drawing on Crenshaw’s work on black women’s employment experiences violence against women of colour, an increasing literature on intersectionality has emerged with an attempt to address several theoretical dilemmas in feminist analyses. The critical strength of the notion of intersectionality, it has been argued, derives from the critical assessment that gender is not a single and unified analytical category and that women have different social, political and historical experiences. Crenshaw has used intersectionality to “describe the location of women of colour both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism.”<sup>19</sup> According to Crenshaw, the location of women of colour at the intersection of race and gender makes their experiences structurally and qualitatively different from that of white women<sup>20</sup> and it is not possible to separate one axis of subordination from the other and to analyze its impact in a vacuum. Crenshaw’s contribution also lies in her theoretical distinction between structural and political intersectionality. According to Crenshaw, “Structural intersectionality occurs when inequalities and their intersections are directly relevant to the experiences of people in society”<sup>21</sup>. Accordingly, an immigrant woman’s experience of domestic violence might differ from a native woman; for instance the prior might face multiple oppressive mechanisms or discriminatory practices which hardens her experience and capability to deal with the experience of domestic violence. Political intersectionality, on the other hand, indicates how inequalities and their intersections are relevant at the level of political strategies. “Political differences are most relevant here, as strategies on one axis of inequality are mostly not neutral towards other axes”.<sup>22</sup> In her essay, Crenshaw particularly shows how a single-axis antidiscrimination doctrine brings black women the dilemma of threatening the unity either of “women” or of “blacks,” depending on the strategy, which they pursue.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Benhabib et al. 1995. *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. Routledge: New York.

<sup>18</sup> Within this context, emerging theoretical and political dilemmas become, “how to frame a non-essentialist analysis of the construction of subjectivity that allows for agency while still recognizing the existence of differences?”, “how is it possible to develop a collective action by recognizing the existence of material and discursive boundaries?” and finally “how to formulate policies which successfully address differences and prevent inequalities?” Berkovitch, Nitzza and Valentine Moghadam. 1999. Middle East Politics and Women’s Collective Action: Challenging the Status Quo, *Special Issue: Middle East Politics, Feminist Challenges*: 284.

<sup>19</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberlé, 1991. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color, *Stanford Law Review*, Vol.43, No.6:1295

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Verloo, Mieke. 2006. Multiple Inequalities, Intersectionality and the European Union *European Journal of Women’s Studies*. Vol. 13(3): 213.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberlé, 1991. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color, *Stanford Law Review*, Vol.43, No.6, 1296.

According to Crenshaw, intersectionality constitutes a critical alternative to identity politics<sup>24</sup> by not only taking into account differences between groups, but also focusing on intra-groups differences. She has also offered the term to “be more broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identities and the ongoing necessity of group politics.”<sup>25</sup> In a similar line, Nira Yuval-Davis has argued that debates on intersectionality can be located between identity politics and transversal politics, or between recognition and recognition/distribution models concerning politics of difference.<sup>26</sup> Although affirming that each social division (class, ethnicity, race, gender) have an ontological basis and there are various political projects and claims based on these divisions, an intersectional approach points out that in concrete experiences people and/or individuals might be caught in intermeshed forms of social, structural and political oppression mechanisms. Yuval-Davis has suggested that, privileging any category of social division or essentializing a particular identity carries the risk of creating “inclusionary/exclusionary boundaries that differentiate between self and other, determining what is ‘normal’ and what is not, who is entitled to certain resources and who is not”<sup>27</sup>, and also of rendering invisible the experiences of certain group members. For her, it is important to analyze how specific positionings and (not necessarily corresponding) constructed identities and political values interrelate, and affect each other in particular locations and contexts.

The concept of intersectionality, introduced by Crenshaw and further developed by other scholars in that sense, has opened a ground for theoretical debate in terms of its strength as a tool for empirical analysis, of its methodology and normative promise.<sup>28</sup>

However, as has been noted, “even those who agree with intersectional theory in principle can disagree about the possibility of applying its insights to research, politics and policy.”<sup>29</sup>

The need for the valuation of diversity and inclusion has been underlined by QUING and the research has had a particular interest in understanding the content and scope of gender equality policies.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, a focus on varying (in)equality axes such as ethnicity, religion and sexuality has been

---

In the words of Verloo “crucial questions in analyzing political intersectionality are: How and where does feminism marginalize ethnic minorities or disabled women? How and where do measures on sexual equality or on racism marginalize women? How and where do gender equality policies marginalize lesbians? See: Verloo, Mieke. 2006. Multiple Inequalities, Intersectionality and the European Union *European Journal of Women’s Studies*. Vol. 13(3): 213.

<sup>24</sup> Baukje Prins. 2006. Narrative Accounts of Origins: A Blind Spot in the Intersectional Approach? *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 13: 278.

<sup>25</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberlé, 1991. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color, *Stanford Law Review*, Vol.43, No.6: 1296

<sup>26</sup> Yuval-Davis, Nira. 2006. Intersectionality and Feminist Politics, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 13: 199.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Davis, Kathy Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What makes a feminist theory successful”, *Feminist Theory*, Vol.9 (1), 67-85, Brah and Phoenix, Ain’t I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality; Alice Ludvig, 2006. Differences Between Women, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 13(3): 245-258.

<sup>29</sup> Editorial: Intersectionality. *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 13(3), 188.

<sup>30</sup> [www.quing.eu](http://www.quing.eu).

attempted in gender + equality policy analyses in the areas of General Gender+ Equality, Non-employment, Intimate Citizenship and Gender-based Violence. The analyses carried out within LARG have aimed to detect a focus on structural intersectionality by asking whether political actors have assessed, recognized or voiced intersecting inequality axes in the presentation of policy problems and in the formulation of consequent policies. Thus, the theoretical approach adopted by QUING maintained that “complex inequality is being constituted in all domains albeit in different ways”.<sup>31</sup>

In our analysis of the Turkish case, references to structural intersectionality could be found in many policy documents. As such, mainly, intersections of employment and marital status, age and geographical location with respect to gender have been problematized.

In the issue of Non-Employment, ‘occupational status’ (working vs. non-working) has been the most-referred category, along with gender. However, this conception has not denoted ‘class’ as an analytical category; Rather, it has referred to the problematic of the permanent ‘non-employment’ of women, which is a norm in the Turkish context as opposed to ‘temporary withdrawal of women from the workforce’ as in the European context. ‘Marital status’ also intersects with gender as well, designating the need for formulation of policies which promote employment of married women and mothers. In the issue of ‘Intimate Citizenship’, the intersection of gender with ‘marital status’ and ‘occupational status’ were the most visible elements in policy debates on ‘marital property’. In these texts, unequal status of married non-working women and the necessity of the valuation of women’s invisible labor in related legislations have also been pointed out.

‘Region’ was also an axis found in almost all domains. Regional differences were mentioned in non-employment documents where unequal conditions of women in rural areas (i.e., women in rural areas work as unpaid workers) were problematized. With respect to debates on ‘Intimate Citizenship’, debates on reproductive rights, such as limited access to health services and knowledge on reproductive issues, have been debated with reference to ‘gender’ and ‘region’.

In ‘Gender-based Violence’, the texts have revealed that intersections with gender have been mainly on the bases of region, marital status, and age. The intersection of gender with region (substituting for ethnicity) has become most apparent in texts dealing with honor killings. Throughout debates on domestic violence, references to religion have also been found; although they were limited to the latter’s inadvertent role, such as ‘misguided tradition’ on women being victims of gender-based violence.

Ethnicity and religion did not appear as readily observable critical axes intersecting with gender in the Turkish policy documents. Although within in the EU context, these variables have been mentioned –with reference to migrant and ethnic minority women as axes of multiple discrimination/inequalities, in the

---

<sup>31</sup>Walby, Sylvia. 2007. A Review of Theory and Methodology for the Analysis of the Implications of Intersectionality for gender Equality Policies in the EU. D13 and D14, WP 16, STRIQ: 10.

Turkish context, categories of ethnicity and religion have not been directly addressed. Rather, policy documents refer to ‘region’ (meaning the Eastern and Southeastern parts of the country), whenever general and/or gender inequalities are under discussion, as an oblique reference to ethnicity as a factor intersecting with gender<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, our analysis of policy documents have revealed less information and insight on the direct handling of intersection with gender with ethnicity and with religion compared to what was aimed by the methodology of QUING. However, it was also clear from our research that the intersection of gender with ethnicity and with religion is highly relevant as a ‘latent’ force in the equality policy environment.

As Walby has argued, “the main focus of QUING is at the intersection of civil society and polity since this is the location of the innovative development of quality gender+ equality policies.”<sup>33</sup> Within this context, examining ‘political intersectionality’ (i.e., asking how political strategies on one axis of inequality have an impact on other forms of inequalities) becomes crucial. Examining social/political movements in terms of their mutual relationship in order to gain further insights into intersectionality in practice<sup>34</sup> is what motivates this research.

Interactions of social movements can take place in different forms ranging from hostility to coalition.<sup>35</sup> While alliances and coalitions do not require ideological agreements and rely on overlapping of interests<sup>36</sup>, they are expected to be more successful for the achievement of policy goals.<sup>37</sup>

The concept of ‘coalitions’ has been used by Crenshaw to underline the political relevance of intersectionality too. In terms of intersectionality, since “gendered identities have been obscured in antiracist discourses, just as race identities have been obscured in feminist discourses”<sup>38</sup>, Crenshaw argued that, “any discourse about identity has to acknowledge how our identities are constructed through the intersection of multiple dimensions, ...[and the need to] recognize that the organized identity groups in which we find ourselves are in fact coalitions, or at least potential coalitions waiting to be formed.”<sup>39</sup> She writes:

---

<sup>32</sup> We have to note that, except some trade union voices, ‘class’ is significantly absent in the policy debates. While an analysis on this issue is further needed, a preliminary remark can be made that considering women’s low participation to economic life and their low representation in those unions somehow limited the development of a ‘gendered’ focus in such institutions. In analyzed texts, class is presented as an overarching theme.

<sup>33</sup> Walby, Sylvia. 2007. A Review of Theory and Methodology for the Analysis of the Implications of Intersectionality for gender Equality Policies in the EU. D13 and D14, WP 16, STRIQ: 10.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Ferree and Miller, 1985

<sup>37</sup> Gamson 1990; Koopmans 1993; Lipsky 1970; Tilly 1978

<sup>38</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 2001. ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color’ , paper presented at the World Conference Against Racism: 14; at: <http://www.wcsap.org/Events/Workshop07/mapping-margins.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

With identity thus re-conceptualized, it may be easier to understand the need for, and to summon the courage to challenge, groups that are after all, in one sense, “home” to us, in the name of the parts of us that are not made at home. This takes a great deal of energy, and arouses intense anxiety. The most one could expect is that we will dare to speak against internal exclusions and marginalizations that we might call attention to how the identity of “the group” has been centered on the intersectional identities of a few. Recognizing that identity politics takes place at the site where categories intersect thus seems more fruitful than challenging the possibility of talking about categories at all. Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics.<sup>40</sup>

On the possibility and promises of coalitions, Sylvia Walby has also affirmed hope. In her critique of Nancy Fraser’s argument, where she claims that a disruptive politics has emerged with the shift from politics of distribution to the politics of recognition, she has argued that a ‘politics of equality’ is thriving in both feminist and anti-racist politics in Western contexts.<sup>41</sup> Walby has provided examples from the UK and the Western countries, where increasing women’s involvement in trade unions and associations gave way to increased demands for equality, not only in terms of politics of redistribution but also in terms of introducing gender equality in legislation.

Another important area, as she notes, is the issue of violence against women. The issue is significant since it refers to a twofold process where “the use of coalitions rather than democratic centralist forms of organization...deal(s) constructively with issues of difference”<sup>42</sup> and “an increasing tendency to legitimate claims by reference to universal rights”<sup>43</sup>, that women’s rights are universal human rights, have been taking place. *Via* coalitions and networks and through the creation of an international agenda on violence against women, she has argued that important steps have been taken over the last 30 years. In that sense, politics of equality has been re-born “within a new political project in which class, gender and race interests are differently balanced. This is a complex networked and coalition-based politics in which claims to recognition are made in order to have the capacity to make effective claims for equality more effectively.”<sup>44</sup>

### **Intermezzo:**

Theoretical debates regarding the contemporary political movements, politics of identity/difference raises questions that are relevant and important for the Turkish context.

---

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.* 15.

<sup>41</sup> Walby, Sylvia. 2001. From Community to Coalition: The Politics of Recognition as the Handmaiden of the Politics of Equality in an Era of Globalization, *Theory Culture Society* Vol. 18(2–3): 118.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 127.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 127.

<sup>44</sup> Ledwith and Colgan. 2000 in Walby Sylvia. From Community to Coalition: The Politics of Recognition as the Handmaiden of the Politics of Equality in an Era of Globalization, *Theory Culture Society* Vol. 18(2–3): 118.

In Turkey, since 1980s, increasing political demands and debates for the recognition and/or extension of political, cultural and religious rights have been creating tensions and challenging the general equality approach of the state, its secular and unitary character as well as the meaning of Turkish national identity and of citizenship.

The ‘Kurdish issue’ and the question of ‘political Islam’ have appeared as the two main issues in which ongoing political and policy demands are articulated by respective domains of activism. Since the 1980s, a feminist women’s movement has also been on stage asserting its own gender equality discourse; one that significantly differs from the Republican conception of equality of women and men. These three types of political activism have followed differing trajectories in terms of their political strategies, their interaction with the state, , and achievements and/or failures in bringing their agendas to the political sphere.

Firstly, in public debates, both the Kurdish issue and the question of Islam have been mostly considered in the form of ‘politics of cultural difference’. Despite the fact that structural inequalities were at the base of issues promoted by these movements, much emphasis has been put on differences in the ways of life and culture. This is particularly the case in the public profile of the Islamic movement. Although this movement has been shaped by a myriad of forces ranging from international politics to demography, rural/urban migration, skewed income distribution and electoral politics, it has come to be mainly symbolized by women’s headscarf and ‘social conservatism’. In the case of the Kurdish issue, as citizens living in the Eastern and Southeastern regions of the country suffer from severe inequalities in terms of their access to economic, social and cultural resources, while these structural inequalities remained in the background of the debate; the conflict between expressing Kurdish cultural identity and combating PKK terrorism have taken the center stage in most national level discussions.

Secondly, the state has been presented by both movements as inadequate if not reluctant, in terms of its recognition and response to the demands of their cultural identity. This approach may have helped in shedding light on a critical element in the equation, the state’s role. However, it also suffered from the same malady it targeted i.e., state-centrism. This preoccupation with the state has also been observed in discussions regarding the role of civil society (as a force rendering or legitimizing inequality or as a source of remedy) to remain largely unexplored in most discussions. The capabilities of women’s organizations associated with different identity movements in addressing gender inequality axes, is, therefore, important in assessing political intersectionality.

Thirdly, as Young has noted, the politics of cultural difference carries the risk of obscuring and normalizing many issues, such as gender inequality. In the Turkish context, the intersection of gender with ethnicity and religion exemplifies this phenomenon clearly. Women suffer from structural and political inequalities more than men. For instance, while men who define themselves as ‘religious’, ‘Islamic’ or

'Muslim' can freely attend universities, and/or enter into civil service, due to the ban on headscarves, women of similar identity and choices are in a relatively disadvantaged position. While this situation is often critiqued as an erroneous state policy, it has also been occasionally articulated by feminists and secular women's groups in Turkey as a gendered issue (or issue of gender). Yet, no debate on the role and meaning of the headscarf (or the so-called obligation to veil) in terms of gender-equality has appeared on the agenda of Islamic circles. Instead, their discourse concentrates exclusively on the politics of 'cultural difference', in this case made even more untouchable by reference to 'divine ordinance' relegating the gender inequality aspect to the invisible background.

The trajectory of the feminist movement in Turkey, however, has followed an altogether different part. Originating in and being led by women of elite social standing and personal achievement and thus speaking from positions of relative economically secure women's demands, liberal or radical feminists' demands were directed to both the state and civil society alike. They have asked for law reform, policy change as well as socio-cultural transformation; and they have targeted patriarchy at state and societal levels, representing, in Young's terminology, a 'politics of positional difference'.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to its Islamic and Kurdish veins, the feminist movement exhibits autonomy from the kind of debilitating 'community pressure'.

In the following part, a brief review of the historical development of various strands of women's political activism in Turkey is presented (a) to introduce the identity characteristics of different groups (b) to analyze their interaction experiences (c) to outline the lines of demarcation among women's groups. It is hoped that this analysis will compliment the LARG and WHY research by helping to draw the contours of an intersectional focus on the civil society side where policy documentation is particularly meager but political activism is rather effective.

### **Women's Movements in Turkey: Assessing the Boundaries**

The 1980s corresponded to a rapid transformation of the socio-economic landscape in Turkey. Economic reform process, accompanied by political liberalization of Turkish society opened politics to international influences helping to bring forth different identity claims. In this period, the rising feminist movement has also found opportunities to draw more attention to the problem of gender inequalities and began criticizing the formal-legalistic, top-down, approach of the Kemalist modernization project. The Republican state has been criticized for its heavy-handed, controlling mentorship expressed by some as 'state feminism' and blamed for causing the women's movement to remain dependent on the state for too

---

<sup>45</sup> Young, Iris Marion. 2007. Structural Injustice and the Politics of Difference, in Anthony Simon Laden et al, eds., *Multiculturalism and Political Theory*, University of Illinois: Cambridge: 62-63.

long.<sup>46</sup> It was also argued that, since the Republican ‘gender equality’ perspective was based on the assumption of the ‘sameness’ of women and men as carriers of the modernization project and dutiful citizens of the Republic,<sup>47</sup> crucial feminist questions, such as ‘the double standard of sexuality’ and ‘double-burden of home and work responsibility’ were disregarded. Similarly, the Republican gender equality policy was also criticized by feminists for not questioning the primarily domestic definition of the female role.<sup>48</sup>

The feminist scholarship of the 1980s and 1990s pointed out that, on one level while the process of ‘rights granting’ was taking place in Turkey, legal structures increasingly attached a political identity to women as ‘citizens’ and regulated their sexual and social individuality.<sup>49</sup> A further implication of this state-led gender equality vision was that, for a considerable time, the beneficiaries of the reforms were mostly urban bourgeoisie women in contrast to people in rural areas who remained almost unaffected by equality policies. While the ‘public arena’ was organized around the notion of modernity and citizen’s legal equality, continuing inequalities in terms of class, gender, religion and ethnicity continued to define the Turkish society while differences along an urban/rural axis remained particularly important. The equality approach cultivated by the Republican nation-state considered these forms of inequalities as problems of development, modernization and of public/private distinction.<sup>50</sup>

In this context, rising feminist activism of the late 1980s introduced new forms of political actions and strategies to focus public attention and raised consciousness at the societal level. Street protests, sit-ins and public campaigns were organized by women to protest internalized patriarchal values and different

---

<sup>46</sup> It has been argued during the early period when the women’s movement attempted to organize around a discourse, somewhat contradictory to the young Republic’s national priorities it was crushed by the state. See: Toprak, Zafer. 1988. Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkasından Önce Kurulan Parti: Kadınlar Halk Fırkası (The Party Formed Before the Republican People’s Party: Women’s People Party), *Tarih ve Toplum* Mart 1988; Toprak, Zafer. 1986. 1935 İstanbul Uluslararası Feminizm Kongresi ve Barış, *Düşün* Mart 1986.

<sup>47</sup> Arat, Yeşim. 1998. Türkiye’de Modernleşme ve Kadınlar (Modernization and Women in Turkey), in *Türkiye’de Modernleşme ve Ulusal Kimlik* (Modernization in Turkey and the National Identity), eds. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba. Tarih Vakfı Yayınları: İstanbul.

<sup>48</sup> Yeşim Arat argues that the state encouraged a number of elite women for professional achievement but sent a message to a larger number of women that they were expected to contribute to the process of modernization by being housewives “à la West”. For more details See: Arat, Yesim. 1997. The Project of Modernity in Turkey, in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba eds. University of Washington Press: Seattle, 95-112. However, other researchers have argued that women educated in Republican institutions designed to train modern housewives actually became professionals that led the way to women’s greater participation in work life in Turkey. See: Toktaş. Şule and Dilek Cindoğlu. 2002. Empowerment and Resistance Strategies of Working Women in Turkey: The Case of 1960-1970 Graduates of the Girls’ Institutes, *The European Journal of Women’s Studies*, Vol. 9 (1): 31-48.

<sup>49</sup> See Miller, Ruth .A. 2007. Rights, Reproduction, Sexuality, and Citizenship in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2007, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 347-373. Also Parla, Ayşe, 2000. The ‘Honor’ of the State: Virginity Examinations in Turkey. *Feminist Studies* 27(1):65–88.

<sup>50</sup> Such an approach was also detected in the policy analyses we conducted for QUING. In all domains where problems regarding gender equality were presented, ‘socio-cultural development’ and ‘modernization’ emerged as commonly referred underlying norms.

kinds of specific discriminations and inequalities experienced by women such as domestic violence, sexual harassment and virginity exams. Gender discriminatory provisions in existing laws were targeted for amendment.

While the 1980s were characterized by the early ‘street activism’ and ‘consciousness raising’ of the women’s movement, in the 1990s and onwards, certain changes in the movement became obvious.

Firstly, since the 1990s, women’s organizations in Turkey had a crucial role in forcing equality legislation to the forefront and in demanding policies for implementation. Secondly, some women’s NGOs became ‘strategic partners’ for the equality policies put in effect by various governments. This active involvement of the women’s NGOs helped in designing and implementing gender equality policies helped in keeping gender equality issues visible also in the media.<sup>51</sup> Partnership of the women’s movement with the private sector emerged in the next decade (2000s) as a new dimension that helped in further legitimating women’s demands.<sup>52</sup> Thirdly, a strong international connection has been an important lifeline for the women’s movement. This connection was maintained, on the one hand, by formal and active involvement of individual Turkish women activists and academics in international organizations such as the UN, Council of Europe and EU bodies, and on the other, by the active participation of women’s NGOs in international civil society such as the European Women’s Lobby.

--

The Turkish state has been strictly secular since the 1920s, with neither legislative nor the administrative system containing any provisions based on religion. From 1980s on, an emphasis on Muslim identity has, nonetheless, gained renewed currency in social and political life with a good number of Islamist intellectuals engaging in radical criticism against the Republic as a secular nation-state and emphasizing the importance of religion in national unity. In this period, Islamist women also gained more visibility and joined the Islamist intellectual-front in their criticism of the secular regime. From 1990s onwards, Islamist political parties have widened their political and ideological ground in the country. In

---

<sup>51</sup> The State Minister for Women and Family Affairs asked the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to support the government design and implement a campaign entitled “Stop Violence against Women” in 2004. UNFPA accepted to take part in this campaign and to provide support. Besides the campaign “Stop Violence against Women”, in October 2004, another campaign by a Turkish newspaper, *Hürriyet*, “No to Domestic Violence” in partnership with the Contemporary Education Foundation, CNN Turk, and Istanbul Governorate Human Rights Department was initiated. Within the scope of this campaign, *Hürriyet* organised training sessions titled “Spouse Relationship Support Program” in order to help improve communication and conflict resolution within families.

<sup>52</sup> In the recent years, business women’s associations have attempted to involve ‘big business’ in women’s issues, not only in support of women’s entrepreneurship and empowerment of women in economic life issues but also to combat violence against women and support women’s participation in politics as part of corporate social responsibility. Turkish Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association (TÜSİAD) 2000. *Kadın-Erkek Eşitliğine Doğru Yürüyüş: Eğitim, Çalışma Yaşamı ve Siyaset* (Towards Gender Equality: Education, Working Life and Politics), December 2000, Publication No. TÜSİAD-T/2000-12/290.

2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), a new conservative party with Islamist roots, succeeded in gaining enough electorate support to come to governmental power.

In the ensuing period, the seculars' suspicion<sup>53</sup> regarding AKP's commitment to secularism was reflected through the developments on the headscarf issue. In the European context, where Islam represents a minority issue, policy regulations on the intersection of gender and religion were often debated within the frames of 'multiculturalism', and 'liberal tolerance'. In Turkey, these issues are currently debated as political regime problems i.e., as questions regarding democracy.<sup>54</sup>

For decades, in Turkey, the conservative and religious reaction to secularization and Westernization was voiced by men. Recently an increasing clash between Islam and secularism has also unfolded in the conflict among women. The controversy over the right to wear the headscarf in the universities and in public employment was turned into a symbolic battle between 'Kemalist' and 'Islamist' women: between those who saw this practice as a symbol of political Islam and therefore incompatible with the institutions and practices of a secular state, and those who insisted on it as a right of women stemming from their religious believes or personal choice.

On this debate, the feminists who followed the footsteps of the second-wave feminist movement in the West have been keeping a distance from old-school secular Kemalists. One strand of these women (feminists) have been displaying a skeptic attitude towards the expression of religious identity, as they associate the 'headscarf' and Islamic worldview with patriarchal control over women's bodies and subordinated women's roles.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> See: Saktanber, Ayşe and Gül Çorbacıoğlu. 2008. Veiling and Headscarf-Skepticism in Turkey, *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, Vol 15. No:4. The authors analyze the headscarf skepticism as a complexity derived from "first, to the elements of the history of the Turkish Republic. Second, it is due to the emergence of new state-society relations, and third, to accelerated developments in the conflict between the religious groups and secularists in Turkey."

<sup>54</sup> Since the mid 1980s several legislative attempts have been made by various governments to design and create specific policies to regulate the use of 'headscarves' by women in higher education institutions and in civil service employment, where the practice has been banned for more than 70 years. In the last two decades by-laws (1982), national legislation (1988) and finally Constitutional amendments (2008) were drafted, passed and/or put in effect to free the use of headscarves in these contexts. All of these have born no fruit as they were deemed illegal and unconstitutional by different courts. In 200. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled in *L. Şahin vs. Turkey* (application no. 44774/98) to uphold the Turkish Constitutional Court's decision to this end. In 2008, the Constitutional Court rejected an initiative by the AKP government to amend the Constitution in order to lift the ban on headscarves in the universities on the grounds that such amendment would itself be unconstitutional as it conflicts with the constitutional provision that calls for equal protection of different kinds of freedoms as well as with such "unalterable" provisions of the Turkish Constitution as the state's secular structure (Constitutional Court Decision, 05.06.2008). The headscarf issue was also carried to the UN CEDAW Committee where it also led to the decision in favor of the state's position i.e. the ban. (*R. Kayhan vs. Turkey*, 8/2005)

<sup>55</sup> It has been noted that the 'equality' demand voiced by the Turkish Islamist women differ from that of other Middle Eastern women who live under Islamic laws. Turkish Islamists women have not needed to struggle for the acquisition of equal legal rights (with a claim of equality as sameness between women and men). See: Merçil, İpek. 2007. *İslam ve Feminizm (Islam and Feminism)*, in *Cinsiyetli Olmak: Sosyal Bilimlere Feminist Yaklaşımlar (Being Gendered: Feminist Approaches on Social Sciences)*, ed. Zeynep Direk, Cogito: İstanbul. 106-118. Differing from

Another strand of feminists have entered into a dialogue with Islamist women and supported their claim for the 'right to education' with headscarves, thus protesting the ban in the universities. It has, however, been argued this was in fact a half-hearted support and that many were actually skeptic about women's 'will' to veil. One scholar, commenting on the increasing dialogue between feminists and Islamist women argued that this was possible only when the latter displayed a critical attitude towards patriarchy and even religion and their reflections on gender relations.<sup>56</sup>

While the intersection of gender with religion has received unprecedented attention in recent years owing to the 'headscarf issue', the intersection of gender with ethnicity within political activism represents another area of conflict.

The 1980s also corresponded with the political mobilization of Kurdish women who organize through their ethnic identity. These women came to be more and more actors of a political struggle and carriers of Kurdish nationalist sentiments. While the 'woman question' was not specifically addressed by the Kurdish nationalist discourse in those years, some analysts have criticized the state and the Republican modernization project for the double marginalization of Kurdish women<sup>57</sup> and the dismantling of their ethnic identity.<sup>58</sup> Mostly dwelling in rural and underdeveloped regions, they have been the least reached by emancipatory, equality policies of the Republic; and have continued to face rigid patriarchal demands of tradition and tribalism in their own communities. In the formation of a Kurdish nationalist discourse in 1980s, the direct and/or indirect consequences of the Kemalist modernization project on Kurdish women were underlined more than the impact of traditional patriarchal social and cultural beliefs and practices of the communities.

As a state, Turkish Republic has never accepted that ethnic identity can constitute a ground on which particular political, social, cultural rights can be demanded. Instead, the framework of

---

Turkish feminists, Turkish Islamist women do not claim for *de facto* gender equality either in line with general Islamist thinking, they entertain the notion of 'complementarity' of sexes and 'gender equity', that is the sharing of functions, roles and responsibilities between sexes on the basis of their nature.

<sup>56</sup> Keskin-Kozat, Burçak. 2003. Entangled in Secular Nationalism, Feminism and Islamism, *Cultural Dynamics*, Vol. 15, No. 2:195.

<sup>57</sup> Kurdish people living in the Eastern and Southeastern region have lower access to land, income, education, health, state resources and their security has been further threatened by the military conflict in the region. Kurdish women living in the region suffer from inequalities more than Kurdish men. The patriarchal structure prevalent in the region makes them more vulnerable to problems like gender based violence within their communities. Due to low educational level in the region, many women cannot speak Turkish. The language barrier hinders their access to legal and official mechanisms through which they can seek their rights. The language problem is operating as an important difficulty in urban areas as well; when Kurdish families migrate to cities, women's lack of linguistic capital prevents their access to interpersonal relations, resources, and to the positions available in Turkey. J. Smits and A. Gündüz-Hoşgör. 2003. Linguistic Capital: Language as a Socio-economic Resource among Kurdish and Arabic Women in Turkey, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol.26, No.5: 829-53. Demirler, Derya and Veysel Essiz. 2008. Zorunlu Göç Deneyimini Kadınlardan Dinlemek: Bir İmkan ve İmkansızlık Olarak Dil (Hearing Forced Migration from Women: Language as Possibility and Impossibility) in *Cinsiyet Halleri* Nil Mutlu (ed.), Varlık Yayınları.

<sup>58</sup> Yüksel, Metin. 2006. The Encounter of Kurdish Women with Nationalism in Turkey, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 5, 777-802, September.

'development' has been used by the state to design and implement regional policies on the elimination of poverty, lack of education and adequate shelter. Particularly, in view of the fact that since 1980s the Kurdish issue has also been put forward by the PKK in terrorist / cessationist activities and was met by a strong military response of the state, efforts for activism on the basis of Kurdish ethnic identity have been found particularly difficult to be heard as legitimate political demands. Several political parties, which were formed around the Kurdish identity, have appeared on the political scene over the years but found it difficult to have a permanent political presence.<sup>59</sup> The repressive attitude of the state has significantly loosened in late 1990s particularly in the aftermath of the capture and imprisonment of the PKK's leader by Turkey. In this period, Turkey's will to fulfill Copenhagen political criteria for EU membership also led to significant democratic reforms. For instance, in 2003, in line with EU demands, restrictions on the teaching of Kurdish language and its use in broadcasting were loosened, and very recently, in January 2009 the state-owned broadcast institution (TRT) launched a Kurdish-language TV channel.

The ongoing social and political tensions over identity issues in Turkish society, nonetheless, were also reflected in public protests carried out mainly by Turkish and Kurdish women's groups. For example, in 1995, Kurdish women who called themselves 'Saturday Mothers' organized weekly protests in Istanbul to demand account of those who were claimed to have disappeared in police custody. Some feminist observers have argued that these protests were not only imitations of their Latin American precedents but that they reflected a feminist mode of organizing, defined by a "willingness to collaborate, share the dilemmas of maternal responsibilities, and have the courage to admit fear."<sup>60</sup> In response to these protests, 'Friday Mothers', the relatives and mothers of soldiers and other state officials killed in the war against PKK also organized protests "to shame the Saturday mothers into respect in awe of the grief of the mothers of the martyrs."<sup>61</sup> Parallel to the fragmentation over the headscarf issue between Kemalists and Islamists women, ethnic identity matters also unfolded in these symbolic confrontations between groups of women.

---

<sup>59</sup> The first of Kurdish political parties was HEP (People's Labor Party) which was founded in 1990 and entered the Parliament in 1991 in an alliance with SHP (Social Democratic Party). In 1993 HEP declared itself as independent from SHP, however it was closed down in the same year. While the court case against HEP was in the process, DEP (Democracy Party) was established by the members of HEP. DEP's political life was also short-lived since the party was banned with the accusation of harmful propaganda and alleged connections with PKK. HADEP (People's Democracy Party) was formed on 11 May 1994 as a successor of DEP, was banned by the Constitutional Court in 2002 and succeeded by DEHAP (Democratic People's Party) which survived between 1997 and 2005. The party was replaced by DTP (Democratic Society Party). The DTP members entered in the 2007 elections as independent candidates from their provinces to bypass the 10% threshold barrier, and 20 of them were selected as deputies. DTP is currently active as a political party within the Parliament; however, a court case for closure is also on the way.

<sup>60</sup> Arat Yeşim, 1999, Democracy and Women in Turkey: In Defense of Liberalism, *Social Politics*, Vol. 6(3)

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

In 1990s a fraction of Kurdish women started to direct their criticisms to the patriarchal structure within Kurdish nationalist movement, and started to engage in political activism with a feminist agenda.<sup>62</sup> Observers have argued that, Kurdish women have benefited from the accumulated experience of political activism which gave way to criticisms of patriarchy and further demands that are relatively autonomous from the nationalist discourses.<sup>63</sup>

Women's political activism in Turkey has expanded in feminist as well as Islamic and Kurdish groups in the last two decades. Emerging political activism within the Islamic and Kurdish cases did not necessarily prioritize gender issues at the onset. Neither of these movements was able to raise their own unique and 'local' conceptions of gender equality. The oppositional politics in these movements, however, helped women gain experience in putting forth political agendas and engaging in activism. An awareness of group differences developed along with increased consciousness of the debilitating role of patriarchal norms.

In the last decade, increasing interaction among women's organizations was often mediated by feminist groups whose discourse offered a whole new realm, opening spaces for cooperation and new forms of political activism simultaneously as it threatened the security of old havens of religion, nation, community and family.

As a consequence of these changes in the character of the women's movement since the 1990s, main issues related to gender equality agenda in the country have also changed, pointing out to a more heterogeneous and diversified set of issues. A broader concern towards women's human rights, as well as women's labor market participation have been added to the existing gender equality issues such as domestic violence, honor killings, high illiteracy rate, and low participation in political decision making.

### **Paths, Traverses, Trespassing of Borders**

In this part of the paper, we will present the findings of our empirical research. The empirical data has been drawn from four in-depth interviews with four women activists (leaders and members) having backgrounds in feminist, Islamist, Kurdish and Kemalist political activism. In our interviews, we wanted to find out about their self perceptions, perceptions of the other and their views on interactions of women's organizations. We wanted to see the demarcation lines between groups as well as to identify the issue areas and positions that are either common or partially shared. Our respondents were particularly

---

<sup>62</sup> In the journals 'Roza' and 'Jujin' published by a group of Kurdish women, instrumental use of women by nationalist discourses was debated. In these magazines the women's movement in Turkey and Turkish feminists were also criticized for ignoring identity differences and for being blind towards different and even multiple forms of inequalities Ozkan Kerestecioglu, İnci, The Women's Movement in the 1990's: Demand for Democracy and Equality" in *The Position of Women in Turkey*, 95.

<sup>63</sup> Çağlayan, Handan. 2007. *Analar, Yoldaşlar, Tanrıçalar: Kürt Hareketinde Kadınlar ve Kadın Kimliğinin Oluşumu*, (Mothers, Comrades, Goddesses: Women and the Formation of Women's Identity in Kurdish Movement) İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul.

selected<sup>64</sup> with reference to their experience in women's organizations, sound knowledge on the political activism in the country, and more importantly, their experience of 'building bridges' between different veins in the women's movement.<sup>65</sup> In the parlance of QUING, we were interested in observing and delineating the dynamics and potential of intersectionality among gender, ethnicity and religion as experienced by women activists in Turkey.

Some key issues in the interaction between women's organizations and in the formation of alliances and the difficulties faced thereof are highlighted as a result of our interviews. These are: *recognition of heterogeneity; the need for a shared language; international influences; the impact of identity politics; borders and minefields, and competitions and power struggles among women's organizations.*

#### *Recognition of Heterogeneity:*

The heterogeneous character of women's political movement, and the internal fragmentation and differentiation within organizations was recognized by all respondents. This was attributed to the prioritization of different agendas (such as headscarf or the Kurdish issue) by different strands of women's movement. Categorization of women's organizations as Kurdish, Islamic, Kemalist or feminist was, however, not well-accepted. Two of our respondents particularly opposed this categorization.

All respondents emphasized their own organization's position as being open to communication and interaction with different actors, some insisting that although in general identities, priorities or ideological orientations of movements might conflict with each other; it is possible to see cooperation among individual women from different organizations. In this respect a differentiation between the 'interaction among women's organizations' and 'interaction among women' was important.

"I have seen that categories like ethnicity, religion or feminism do not separate us. Rather, it is the companionship (*yol arkadaşlığı*) we choose to establish during the journey; this is what brings us together or draws us apart. It is important to pay specific attention to the coalition of those women who try to traverse between categories and domains". (*Feminist woman activist*)

#### *Shared Language:*

The need for the development of a 'shared language' was also a common concern, despite the fact that the nature and ideological basis of such language remained ambiguous. The use of imported feminist concepts and terminology, it was argued by one respondent, carried the risk of not addressing contextual

---

<sup>64</sup> Selection of respondents was impacted by practical limitations of time and location.

<sup>65</sup> The interviews were conducted in April 2009 where each respondent was visited at the organizations she has been working. A specific set of questions aiming to explore their experiences, views and opinions on gender equality issues, women's organizations, political activism and on interaction of women activists were asked. The duration of the interviews varied between two and three hours.

injustices, local problems and even the danger of concealing local gender realities and gender inequality practices.<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, it was argued that ‘feminism’ itself was represented as an imported, Western oriented discourse for many women in the country and created a distance between ordinary women and women’s organizations.

“Since the day we established this platform, we have been in touch with women’s movement. While doing this we have recognized the fact that many women in Turkey do not feel as citizens and do not act on the issues concerning their lives. They just wait...If any progressive regulations are made for them, they are pleased. However, there are several obstacles preventing their active participation in this struggle. Jargon difference is an important matter. For instance, the secular or feminist jargon used by many leading women’s organizations is a discourse which is not shared, approved or dared to be used by many women’s organizations having religious-conservative tendencies. This difference of jargon, as a matter of fact, plays a segregating role and pushes groups to stay in their own domains.” (*Conservative-religious woman activist*)

It is emphasized that a shared language is important for the recognition of differences between groups as well as for setting the boundaries between positions. It has been argued that communication among groups might help in dealing with differences by making them explicit, yet not necessarily exclusionary.

“The friends with religious sentiments are particularly experiencing difficulties with using a certain language. They avoid statements, which debate ‘control over bodies’ or ‘sexuality’ or demands for ‘freedom for sexual orientation’. Their hesitancy or carefulness on the use of language and terms sometimes creates difficulties for us too. We after years of (feminist) struggle have come to a point, where we no longer debate the use of such statements. Yet still, this divergence is understandable... By being visible they (conservative-religious women) have become the ‘bad girls’ in their own neighborhoods; hence they do not want to endanger their position further. These might be considered as the birth pangs of a new language” (*Feminist woman activist*)

It has been stated that common platforms helped women’s organizations to leave their particular domains and to open themselves for alternative views. In our interviews, we have witnessed that in most cases respondents have developed a shared understanding of each other’s needs and recognized the differing values and goals. Furthermore, they appreciated the interaction between women’s organizations as contributing to the development of common goals and giving way to a mutual transformation. As an example, the term ‘conservative women’ in lieu of ‘Islamic/Islamist women’ is used by feminists displaying their willingness to define identities as they are defined and used by respective political agents.

---

<sup>66</sup> In this context, a recent example was pointed out. When statistical or academic studies on the issue of gender-based violence, as a recent nation-wide survey on the topic showed<sup>66</sup>, use the Turkish dictionary equivalent of such terms as ‘sexual harassment’ (*cinsel taciz*) and ‘rape’ (*tecavüz*), these may be incomprehensible to local women. For many women in the countryside, these ‘clinical’ terms often do not signify anything. The phrase, which corresponds to the action of rape or harassment, may be different in differing contexts.

With respect to the interaction with Kurdish groups, it was noted that between 1999 and 2003 more contact points were established between Turkish feminists and Kurdish women's movement. Albeit being temporary and fragile in character, these contacts contributed to each party's widening of their perspective and to their learning from each other.

"I can say that I was the person who put down the quota for women on paper in HADEP<sup>67</sup> (People's Democracy Party)'s party regulation. This quota system is now applied by DTP<sup>68</sup> (Democratic Society Party) as well. In fact, I worked with a Turkish feminist professor from Ankara University on the proposal and benefited from her advices on the requirements of the system. This is an example of a collaborative work but is also an indicator. There were other collaborations in other domains. Especially common platforms contributed to the communication between Turkish feminists and Kurdish women. It is via the debate with the feminists, Kurdish women started to create agendas which have more focus on women's issues...In the last several years they haven't been using statements like 'feminism is a deviation'... Rather they consider it as a heritage. It is a ground on which Kurdish women activists stand and make political claims even if they do not label themselves as feminists. Such interactions also caused Turkish feminists to recognize the reality of different identities, differing forms of grievances and that the claims on these grounds cannot be ignored." (*Analyst on Kurdish women's movement*)

#### *International Influences:*

The emergence of global gender equality norms and specifically the impact of EU and UN regulations were both important forces in the development of women's rights in Turkey. While familiarity with international norms such as CEDAW and the EU *Acquis* has paved the way for recognition and promotion of women's rights and gender equality standards by the state, these normative frameworks and their institutional structures also helped in supporting women's organizations of all persuasions.

In this context, it is well-known that not only feminist and Kemalist women, but also conservative/Islamist and Kurdish women's groups were active in seeking support from these international bodies for the validation of their particular positions and political claims. Although our conservative-religious respondent mentioned that women with headscarves are disappointed with they considered to be the lack of European legal support to their cause, as revealed in the Leyla Sahin vs. Turkey decision<sup>69</sup> of the European Court of Human Rights, she admitted that through international network development and lobbying, it has been possible to raise awareness of their 'suffering' caused by the ban on headscarves in universities and in the public sector.

---

<sup>67</sup> HADEP (People's Democracy Party) was formed on 11 May 1994 as a successor of HEP and DEP, opposition parties that have the claim to represent Kurdish identity and political interests. HADEP was banned by the Constitutional Court and succeeded by DEHAP (Democratic People's Party) which was founded in 1997.

<sup>68</sup> The party was founded in 2005, as the merger of the DEHAP.

<sup>69</sup> Leyla Sahin v. Turkey (application no. 44774/98)

Formation of trans-national networks is seen as beneficial not only for the creation of pressure on the national governments but also for the exchange of knowledge and the transformation of global agendas.

“Despite the good intentions the relationship between Western and Third World feminisms has generally been in line with the thinking that considers the West as the ‘liberator’ and the Third World women as the ‘liberated’...This might be due to prejudices or ignorance and is not correct. This is particularly the case in the political arena and for the Turkish women’s movement...*via* some common platforms we take part in such organizations as European Women’s Lobby, we find chances to be within the European women’s network, get involved in the political process going on there not only for implementing political pressure on the (government) here but also for shaping the political agendas there. And I think we are doing it quite well. For example, (a while ago) the European Parliament was preparing a report on Turkish women. In a very short time we established a group composed of academics working in the area, prepared a Turkey-women report, mobilized women’s organizations and by using our networks in European Women’s Lobby we succeeded in getting 90% of our feedback incorporated into the report of the European Parliament....” (*Feminist woman activist*)

The effectiveness of the current policies developed for the advancement of women’s rights in Turkey was suspect in the eyes of all our respondents. So far as gender equality issues are concerned, respondents’ views regarding government and politics in Turkey general were skeptical. The respondents who had affinities with feminist, Kemalist and Kurdish political movements were all further distrustful of the (AKP) government.

As a conservative party with Islamist roots, AKP was blamed for not having adequate political will and genuine commitment to the notion of gender equality and it was blamed for displaying inconsistent attitudes on the matter.

Even the respondent from the conservative-religious women’s organization stated that, for many conservative men, neither the very low rate of women’s employment in Turkey nor women’s limited participation in politics were priority concerns. She underlined the impact of international conventions and obligations and particularly the role of the EU in the adoption of many legislative reforms for gender equality by this government. At the same time, as she underlined the negative socio-cultural factors feeding into the patriarchal mentality of law-makers and political leaders, she also stressed the positive role which the EU played in the formation of AKP’s political vision and identity. For her, the party elites who were aware of the fact that they needed a change, a different vision (other than previous Islamist formulations) for the development of a transformative politics really benefited from the EU accession process as a guideline. She stated that the EU also has been functioning both as a source of legitimacy and motivation in the formulation of political demands such as increased freedoms, extension of rights, and of recognition of differences. In this sense, she argued that conservative women could also use the EU as a springboard in making claims from the state and as a basis of legitimation for their demands.

*The Impact of Identity Politics:*

The autonomy of women's organizations that are associated with Islamic and Kurdish movements remains as a contested issue as it is often argued that both of these movements land legitimacy to political claims of women to the extent that these demands are based on identity politics and symbols of the larger political movement and helped for legitimating their goals there.

Some observers, including feminists, nonetheless think that in the Turkish context, women's engagement in such identity politics as Islamic and Kurdish movements has facilitated their empowerment and political participation in the larger society.<sup>70</sup>

On the other hand, identity politics is also seen as a dangerous game by many people, including our respondents. Attachment to identities, forming cliques, ranks and 'othering' processes carry the risk of preventing communication and coalition building. To the extent that identity politics brings with itself limits acceptability that are exclusively defined by reference to the identity markers, it is also argued that it prevents flexibility and/or allegiance to alternative loyalties. For instance, on the above interaction between feminists and Kurdish women, one of our respondents stated that "the temporal and fragile nature of women's coalitions derive from the continuous restructuring of solid identities. The restructuring process is linked with the armed conflict between state and PKK." She argued that Turkish feminists and Kurdish women initiated much contact between 1999 and 2005, when political violence had ceased in the country, but that contact was interrupted in 2005 when armed conflicts resurged. This line of argument emphasized that bringing women's issues to the fore requires a relatively secure environment and it is not possible to talk about domestic violence when ongoing political violence threatens lives.

Similarly, it is claimed that "the issue of headscarf has moved into a deadlock since it is now considered as a political issue (Political Islam) and tried to be solved *via* political mechanisms." Had 'sociological' dimensions of the issue been considered, analyzed and 'sociological' solutions been searched, negotiations or partial solutions might have been developed:

"No one today is able to discuss or even think about the role of headscarf in the terrain of male dominance. It seems as long as these bans continue to exist, we will not be able to discuss this."  
(*Conservative-religious woman activist*)

Politics of identity or difference is even more cautiously approached by others who prioritize education and development and shy away from relating gender equality issues with ethnicity or religion,

---

<sup>70</sup> Arat Yeşim, 1999, Democracy and Women in Turkey: In Defense of Liberalism, *Social Politics*, Vol. 6(3); Çağlayan, Handan. 2007. *Analar, Yoldaşlar, Tanrıçalar: Kürt Hareketinde Kadınlar ve Kadın Kimliğinin Oluşumu*, (Mothers, Comrades, Goddesses: Women and the

because they think the latter course ‘puts the cart before the horse’, addressing political level issues rather than social/structural root causes.

“You cannot ignore identity, this is not possible... There are Kurds, Laz, Abhazi, Suryani etc. in Turkey. The state did not discriminate (among them); it did not say “you cannot have education because you are a Kurd”... Women living in Eastern and Southeastern regions have been experiencing (more) problems due to the feudal structure of those regions... We have to change this situation without provoking ethnic differences... by educating people of the region.”(Kemalist-secularist woman activist)

### *Competitions and Power Struggles*

Clearly, women’s groups compete over access to governmental power sources and authorities. In this sense, the General Directorate on the Status of Women (KSGM) is a critical institution. KSGM was established as a central coordination unit functioning under the Prime Ministry and the Minister of State in charge of ‘Family and Women’s Affairs’ in 1990 as a body responsible for coordinating governmental policy and measures on gender equality issues (including empowerment of women, promotion of women’s human rights, eradication of violence against women and promotion of women’s political participation). It is also mandated to contribute to policy-making and advocacy on these matters and to fulfill state reporting obligations to international conventions. Despite the fact that this agency is far from being a major force in the state or society (owing to its very limited budget and personnel resources) it is considered critical by women’s groups.

Different groups accused the agency for not being autonomous; for being under the control of rival groups<sup>71</sup> and/or dependent on the personality and politics of the Minister in office<sup>72</sup>.

What perhaps leads further support to the complains of feminist and religious women about their exclusion from KSGM is that our Kemalist respondent confirmed her organization’s presence in the Advisory Council of KSGM and affirmed that working with this institution is crucial to insert women’s issues into the political agenda of the government.

It was clear in these interviews that there is an insipid competition among women’s groups for access and influence over the sites, institutions and networks with potential power in the area of gender equality. On the one hand, women seemed to affirm the legitimacy and importance of national and

---

<sup>71</sup> For instance, despite the presence of a conservative government, conservative-religious women claimed KSGM was dominated (as reflected in the composition of its Advisory Council) by women’s organizations that are hostile to the headscarf issue. Our conservative-religious respondent argued that these “secularist” women knew very well that “the headscarf issue was the AKP government’s soft belly and that the government was not ready to pursue the matter for fear of its political cost. So she thought under AKP rule KSGM policy, practice and affinities became even more shaped by secular women’s priorities.

<sup>72</sup> The Minister at the time of our research was noted to be rather distant women’s organizations and especially to feminists. Our respondents thought that for many women’s organizations the last several years were years of ‘almost no relationship’ with the state.

international networks and institutions in which they participated. On the other hand, those who believed that they do not have adequate access complain from being excluded from these networks.

As the role of women in politics is, by any standard, minimal in Turkey it was not surprising that women activists were very critical of the present political system. Furthermore, present female parliamentarians were criticized for lacking feminist consciousness and/or a political perspective on gender issues. These women were seen as owing their political positions to male leaders and were accused of being controlled by the political leadership on account of their lack of independent political base.

In the case of religious women, the issue became further complicated. The prolonged debates on the headscarf issue, legal battles between political elites and the judiciary; and the final deadlock fueled serious feelings of disappointment in these women towards the political system. A feeling of resentment developed on the part of these women towards the AKP and towards the non-veiled women politicians within this party.

Since 1990s, veiled conservative-religious women have been active in Islamic political parties undertaking a significant portion of philanthropic and mobilization activities for these parties in local settings.<sup>73</sup> However, none of these women could move up in the formal political system due to their headscarves. Viewing the current women parliamentarians of AKP as relatively distant to the headscarf issue, these women regard them as having risen to political office on the shoulders of the ‘cause’ and efforts of veiled activists.

“It is interesting...to be veiled and a women’s rights defender is often perceived as a threat ... Some women friends in the party (who) do not wear headscarves. Despite the fact that they do represent the traditional base in appearance... next to the women who wear the headscarf but talk in ‘feminist’ language these women are considered safer because although unveiled they are advocates of traditional morality, and are often more easy-going. Those women do not create problems like we do (for male politicians) so they are preferable to work with. After all, some women need to be ‘bad’ so that others can be the ‘good women’. (In the eyes of the conservative-religious, patriarchal community) we are the ‘problem’ women.” (*Conservative-religious woman activist*)

#### *Borders and Minefields:*

Classification of women’s organizations on ethnic and religious axes is not preferred, yet boundaries of movements are a reality. In this sense, there are some issues which are like ‘mines’ and cannot be touched very easily. In this context, feminists argue that they are more open to debates than other strands of women’s organizations. Yet, still:

“The issue of headscarf is one of the untouchable issues for many feminists too. The headscarf represents (for feminists) patriarchy since it is seen as an instrument of control over women’s

---

<sup>73</sup>Ayata, Ayşe and Fatma Tütüncü. 2008. Party Politics of the AKP (2002-2007) and the Predicaments of Women at the Intersection of the Westernist, Islamist and Feminist Discourses in Turkey, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 35(3): 363 -384.

bodies. In that regard, standing with veiled women on the issue of headscarf means providing support to patriarchy...On the issue of ethnicity, there is the suspicion or fear (for feminists) of becoming an instrument for a larger scale political struggle, which is considered to be a threat to national unity by the state and some parts of society. For women with headscarves, homosexuality, ethnicity and even feminist discourses such as ‘our bodies are ours’ are issues, which create distances.” (*Feminist woman activist*)

“Not only conservative women but many women do not want to demonstrate on 8 March (International Women’s Day) parade by yelling: ‘Isn’t it rape when it’s at home? If you don’t want to have sex, say no!’ (*Conservative-religious woman activist*)

The demarcation between religious women and feminists also reflected itself openly in the recent past during the advocacy and activism of the Penal Code amendment process. When an MP belonging to the ruling AKP proposed an amendment to the Penal Code to re-criminalize adultery, an unexpected wave of criticism by both national and international actors was prompted. The news of the proposed amendment also led to demonstrations by various women’s groups. It has been stated that the cooperation and mutual support among Turkish women’s organizations that up until that point had engaged successfully in efforts to introduce women’s rights based legal provisions, fell apart when Islamic women did not want to display a manifest opposition to the proposed amendment. The series of events at this time was regarded differently by the parties involved.

“In the issue of adultery they (conservative-religious women) displayed an ambiguous attitude: they were neither present nor absent. They decided against participating in the (final) protest. Actually the protest was not on adultery specifically; yet they decided to withdraw (from the event) because of slogans (like ‘our bodies belong to us’)...I can respect this decision...However, what they did (when we went to the Parliament to protest) was to be in the building but not at the entrance... implying (to some) that they (conservative-religious women) were not there (with us) and to others that they were there. I do not find this correct.” (*Feminist woman activist*)

“We supported the decriminalization of adultery in covert manner. But we did not go to the arena (to the public protest). For this our (feminist) friends were angry with us... If we had gone the media would have sensationalized (our participation); we did not know what they would do. (Feminists) accused us of leaving them alone and said they had become ‘unveiled whores’ (in the eyes of the conservative public). We discussed the issue amongst ourselves but could not dare (participate) because the media is not ethical.” (*Conservative-religious woman activist*)

“One of the problems with ethnicity...is that sometimes political demands on ethnic identity might turn into a form of ethnic nationalism which leads to overlooking violation of (women’s) rights or limitation of freedoms....(Also) positions that are totally unacceptable for other individuals or groups (can emerge). For instance a public statement (made by one group) declaring that “so long as the state continues the military operations (against the PKK) it will be met with similar (military) response” could not be accepted by us. Another difficulty we have had (in the interaction between feminist and Kurdish women’s groups) stems from the different approaches to peace. Debates on just and unjust war or who should cease fire first constitute

axes of disagreement even among different factions of the same movement.” (*Feminist woman activist*)

On another vein, Kemalist women are viewed as having a particularly difficult time reconciling their loyalties with some of the controversial and pressing concerns of women’s agenda in Turkey.

“For them, all three categories, Kurdish, feminist or veiled women are unacceptable, since (Kurdishness) represents an assault on the abstract concept of citizenship because ethnicity has a traumatic impact on this conceptualization... (Feminists) say ‘we are no one’s honor’; ‘rights belong to us’. This conflicts with the idea of ‘Republican woman’ whose presence in the public sphere has been assured by her asexual and chaste image and (veiled women) clash with the conception of modern and secular... For those Kemalist women, coming together with all of these categories is problematic, and it is quite understandable.” (*Analyst on Kurdish women’s movement*)

### *Successful Examples of Coalition Platforms*

In Turkey, several successful examples of coalition platforms among women’s groups have occurred in the last decade. In these cases the internationally oriented platforms have led the way.<sup>74</sup> While different veins of the women’s movement have found it easier to coalesce under the perceived ‘neutrality’ of international standards, these platforms enabled them to come together to promote gender equality and respond to specific developments or violations when need be.

The women’s movement also gained significant experience through national campaigns for law reform (as exemplified in the Penal, Civil<sup>75</sup> and Constitutional<sup>76</sup> amendment processes). In these cases, communication among different stakeholders and cooperation across identity barriers for the higher purpose of gender —conceived as ‘sameness of rights’— was achieved.

---

<sup>74</sup> The experience National Working Group for the CEDAW Shadow Report (2003-2005) is cited as a good example of platform where many women’s groups met and interacted fruitfully even though a conflict among the Islamic and secular NGOs did surface during the presentation of the report. The national platform for the European Women’s Lobby (EWL) was also seen as a platform, which enabled many women’s organizations to link with their European counterparts and to form networks and alliances.

<sup>75</sup> The TCK Kadın Platformu (Women’s Platform on Turkish Penal Code) was cited as a well-organized and effective network for collective action. The Platform was formed in 2002 by 29 women’s NGOs, worked actively for the incorporation of women’s demands to the New Penal Code. Women’s Platform established during the preparation of the New Civil Code (2001) and the coalition formed for the Constitutional Amendment.

<sup>76</sup> The Constitutional amendments of 2004 constitute an important reflection of the change in policies towards women. Although an explicit provision on gender equality was present in the Turkish Constitution formerly, by the addition of a provision to Article 10 of the Constitution in 2004, the state was deemed responsible not only for ensuring non-discrimination between women and men, but also to take necessary measures for equality in practice in every field. Another amendment to Article 90 of the Constitution was adopted in 2004 giving supremacy to international conventions concerning basic rights and freedoms, including CEDAW, over all national laws.

In this process, one also notes the tendency to move from general, gender-based types of collaboration to more specific gender equality oriented issues which may signal a proliferation of equality politics and/or reflection of interest-based collaborations.<sup>77</sup>

### **Epilogue:**

In the last two decades, an increased number of women came to engage in political activism. The rise of Islamist, Kurdish and feminist political opposition in the country fuelled this tendency and in the early phases, these groups differing in terms of members' backgrounds, their political agendas and styles of mobilization were very detached from if not hostile towards one another.

The major dividing line between Kemalist women and others was the former's unyielding commitment to secularism and the Republic's equality policies when Kurdish and Islamist groups criticized these policies for preventing religious expression, ignoring ethnic identity claims and feminists accused them of being blind towards gender inequality, particularly in the private sphere. Islamist and Kurdish women's groups, despite the ground they shared in their opposition to state policies and their affiliation with identity politics, none the less kept a distance from each other by virtue of their allegiance to exclusionary community loyalties. Some feminists, owing to their opposition to patriarchal culture, were skeptical of the kind of identity politics characterizing Islamist and Kurdish movements but shared with them a fundamental distrust of the state.

In spite of this general picture of detachment and incompatibility, increased contact and even coalitions among different women's groups have been achieved in the recent years. The increase in the numbers and variety of organizations, associations, platforms etc. of women, working on diverse gender equality issues increased the chances of contact between different activists in the country. Experience in political activism, albeit in different veins, helped improve women activists' self confidence, contributed to their empowerment and was effective in helping some women's groups achieve relative autonomy from their community base. Knowledge on feminism and familiarity with universal standards of women's rights also help increase women's awareness of diverse gender equality issues and their capacity to form

---

<sup>77</sup> For instance, *Birbirimize Sahip Çıkıyoruz* (We are Looking after Each Other-BSC) and *Barış için Sürekli Kadın* (Women Always for Peace) were pointed out as successful example of coalitions among women's groups. *Birbirimize Sahip Çıkıyoruz* (2008) campaign was a petition signed by more than 1000 women (activists from different women's organizations, academics, feminists etc.) on the headscarf issue in 2008. The BSC campaign represented a women's coalition to protest the ban on headscarves by declaring that a public sphere in which all (women) cannot walk arm in arm is not women's public sphere. The campaign text also denounced any forms of discrimination against women, segregation of women and use of women by political ideologies.

*Barış için Sürekli Kadın* was a platform established, following the U.S.'s declaration of the War on Terrorism, by several women's organizations and left-wing, anarchist, LGBT groups, trade unions and some political parties. It was an anti-war gathering where predominantly Islamist and Kurdish groups and feminists cooperated on a common political agenda.

common platforms. These platforms in turn were influential in the recognition of differences, mutual understanding of positions and even transformation of attitudes.

Yet still, it has been noted that cooperation among women's groups in Turkey are largely dependent on individual initiatives and persistence. In the Turkish experience, common platforms are fragile and temporary in character, primarily because of their *ad hoc* nature. Competitions amongst groups over resources from the state and international agencies and linkages to state authorities continue to be important. Religious, secular and /or ethnic ideology based differences, which run deep in personal and community psyches, continue to be important dividing lines of the women's movement. In our interviews this fact was reflected as the "trap of identity politics" and "borders and minefields" to watch for.

Women from different groups generally express their trust in other women and their hope in the potential of women's solidarity and cooperation. The development of a shared language that articulates common concerns in neutral manner is important. Discourses that are legitimated by reference to universal rights and international standards find easier acceptance. To the extent that feminists can rightfully claim affinity with this heritage and address the multiple dimensions of inequalities from a vantage point equidistant to all others, they appear to have the best potential to play a catalytic role in fostering cross-border alliances across the women's movement in Turkey.

Walby asserts that a politics of equality is in re-birth within feminist politics (i) with the increased participation and involvement of women in political processes (ii) increased legitimacy of a universal women's rights discourse and (iii) increased use of coalitions by diverse groups.<sup>78</sup>

The trajectories of different veins of the women's movement in Turkey, as well as responses of activists/analysts in our interviews, reveal hope in this regard.

---

<sup>78</sup> Walby, Sylvia. 2001. From Community to Coalition: The Politics of Recognition as the Handmaiden of the Politics of Equality in an Era of Globalization, *Theory Culture Society* Vol. 18(2-3).